"NO KEY TO THE TANGLE": HISTORY AND POETIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN LOUIS
ZUKOFSKY'S *"A"*

A Thesis
by
GRIFFIN ROWE

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the question of poetry's relationship with history. My inquiry is centered on the epic poem *"A"* (1974) by American author Louis Zukofsky, considering the ways in which Zukofsky reconceptualizes the role that the past – its events, people, art – plays in the construction of a modern poetic consciousness. The project is divided into two sequences: historical representation of movements "A"-22 and "A"-23 in the poem and historical engagement in movements "A"-21 and "A"-24. The first sequence is a survey of the ways in which Zukofsky recreates the last 6,000 years of history in a manner that resists linearity and narrative. I read his poetry alongside Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History" (1940) and Gilles Deleuze's *Essays Clinical and Critical* (1997) in order to consider the extent to which Zukofsky problematizes historical *and* literary language, and their limits of communication and expression in the poetic-now. The second sequence focuses on the historical materials with which Zukofsky engages, primarily the

Roman playwright Plautus, as well as Zukofsky's own previous writing. I contend that Zukofsky method of participating with history in his work is a kind of creative engagement with the past, one that acknowledges history as a living thing and seeks to absorb it into the formation of a new poetics. This is a performance of escape-work, so that texts, through active historical participation, resist textual totality and begin to reconnect themselves to the world outside of their binding in order to *work* within our contemporary reality.

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Dedication

For my brother, Chris.

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End of page,
end of this

company – wee
notebook kept

my mind in hand,
Let the world stay

open to me
day after day,

words to say,
things to be.

      Robert Creeley, "The End"

Introduction

"let me live here ever": Louis Zukofsky's Poetics of History

The intersection of philosophy and history engenders a certain problem of reading. We often consider history as a record, a flawless, objective account of things that have come before. This information is meant to educate us on the manner of our arrival into the present moment and, like the cold, mathematical equation, justifies the outcomes of events that create the contemporary state of things without the opportunity or worse the necessity for doubt or reconsideration. But philosophy recognizes that things cannot be reduced to such basic components, that history is as much a product of conflicting ways of thinking. It has taught us that to read history is akin to reading any other text and necessitates a critical eye and skepticism towards the reductionism of grand, sweeping, and politically powerful historical narratives. This is not to say, however, that these narratives do not hold some influence regardless of their validity.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche posed this issue in an essay in which he describes the pressure of the historical on the contemporary individual through the allegory of looking at an animal:

> [the human] also wondered about himself and how he was unable to learn to forget and always clung to what was past; no matter how far or how fast he runs, that chain runs with him. It is a cause for wonder: the moment, here in a flash, gone in a flash, before it nothing, after it nothing, does, after all, return as a ghost once more and disturb the peace of a later moment.
> ("On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," 126)

This is a haunting that is fundamentally inescapable because it is not a physical presence, even in a future where there is no written history, the memory carried by society will linger and permeate into new policy, culture, economy. Walter Benjamin, an ardent student of Nietzsche's work, took the opposite view when constructing his drafts and notes for the

unfinished *Arcades Project* (*Passagenwerk*), a historical and philosophical explorations of the Paris Arcades as an emblem for the culture of the 19th century. Benjamin considered his goal for the book to be the building of a "dreaming city," and while the text was never finished, its current state is a testament to the value of collecting and collaging historical material as a means of understanding the way the present is shaped and the social responsibility contemporary individuals possess today to the future.

One place to read this same tendency is in the poetry which seeks to tell or retell history, particularly the epic poem, which has historically served as an artistic monumentalizing of nationalist pride and narrative, as in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* or Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. But if we are to postulate a writing which does not flatten the complexities of historical and social narratives along national lines, then it is necessary to find an adequate example in a different kind of epic poem.

Louis Zukofsky is a poet whose work, despite its contributions to the second-generation modernist aesthetics, carries a tendentious and under-appreciated relationship to high modernism. During the late 1920's and early 1930's, Zukofsky seemed on the verge of breaking through into the mainstream of American avant-garde poetry, but alas, his publishing output was limited, and the financial constraints forced to him to take up employment in schools and for the WPA project until his retirement in the 1960's. His writing went largely ignored throughout his career, though his post-retirement period proved to be the time of his most prolific output. Although Zukofsky was not fully embraced by the movements of early modernism, his work is nevertheless a stunning instance of this era of literary and artistic production and therefore provides a productive source of inquiry into an under-discussed practitioner of experimental writing: his writing is historical, of its moment.

Zukofsky's magnum opus, the epic poem *"A"*, was written in a period stretching from 1928 to 1974. It is one of the most ambitious and experimental long poems of the twentieth century. It is also one of the most challenging. Zukofsky's project is concerned with the concepts of historiography, poetic tradition, and the limits and potentials of language. At over 800-pages, *"A"* is composed of 24 "movements", like Homer's epics, but there is no semblance of any overarching narrative or plot. It is a poem concerned with poetry, predating some of the metaprosodic concerns of the Language poets of the 1970's and 80's.

This project is aimed at arriving at a reading of Zukofsky's *"A"* on different terms than those which have been taken up by scholarship in the past. Much of the study of Zukofsky hones in on his work's complexities and the task of explaining their significance in a coherent manner. I propose a reading that considers the work as a machine, with its vast use of referentiality reaching out to various historical moments and entangling together disparate temporalities. It is important to consider *"A"* within the context of its composition, but I contend that due to the central role that history plays in the structure and content of the text, it is necessary to read *"A"* along the lines of its engagement with historical material, not as an end in itself, but as the point of departure for cultivating a poetic consciousness which absorbs and embodies that history.

If history is the narrativizing of the past, then *"A"* is anything but history; it is a deposit, a heap. It is a pile of notes, broken statues, old songs, favorite poems, the remains of time passed and the artifacts of the poet's personal life. Zukofsky reorients historical perspective by eschewing linearity and presenting history as a collage of these fragments. This method allows for the reorganization of time along the lines of poetic developments; it

is no longer organized by chronology, but by movements of language, where figures like Catullus and Shakespeare function as guideposts through history. By reading history through its writing and thereby altering the traditional view of that history's order, Zukofsky is attempting to carve out a new poetic that is as disruptive to poetic tradition as it is to historiography. It tests the limits of what is communicative in language and, more importantly, the possibilities of language that does not follow lines of tradition. Though it is grounded in a firm understanding of what has come before, Zukofsky's writing hypothesizes a kind of poetry that is not the logical successor to its history. Rather, he folds the past into his work in a way that makes it seem like the history of poetry is happening all at once.

If we read the poem in this way, we stand to gain a more nuanced understanding of the productive role that engagement with history can serve in contemporary poetics, as well as problems of history writing and the ways in which we think about history, an issue articulated by Walter Benjamin in "On the Concept of History" (1940). We do not look back on history in a clear path that leads to where we are standing; we look back at a tangled mess, and, as Zukofsky shows, there is "no key to the tangle" (*"A"* 518). By synthesizing the concept of history put forth by Benjamin and the methods of reading language and sign-production by Gilles Deleuze, particularly in his concept of a "stuttering language," I argue that Zukofsky employs a fractured, vibrating language to show both the seams of language and its implications in the ways the past is retold through that language. In doing so, Zukofsky puts forth a model of historical writing in the epic that does not "contain history," as the poet Ezra Pound sought to do, but (re)produces it and makes it new. It is in this way that Zukofsky merges the concerns of history, poetic tradition, and the possibilities of language.

Review of Scholarship

The body of critical scholarship on Zukofsky's work is marked by its paucity. Very few printed works are dedicated solely to Zukofsky, and only one is devoted to *"A"*. In that text, Barry Ahearn's *Zukofsky's "A"*, he writes that scholarship is not ready to devote that much study to the poem (1). As such, he does not even claim the book to be a comprehensive study of the poem on the whole. While Ahearn's work is the most insightful and "complete" reading of *"A"* as a whole, its status as the only such book to approach Zukofsky indicates the necessity of a more devoted and in-depth reading of the most ambitious work Zukofsky produced. This is not a criticism of scholarship in particular cases, but the identification of a certain gap in the field of Zukofsky studies. This gap is a challenge but necessitates the advancement of a reading of Zukofsky's work grounded in the relationship between the poet and his past.

My reading of the scholarship on Zukofsky has led me to a reading which centers itself closely on *"A"*, taking into account Zukofsky's engagement with the history of literature toward a close reading of its intricate and diverse form and emphasis on sound. At the same time, I intend to move beyond simply surveying the work or explaining its forms/techniques as their own end, avoiding the scholarly tendency to rely too heavily on his biography, especially concerning his immediate literary predecessors.

The earliest criticism on the work of Zukofsky comes primarily in the writing of other poets, some of whom were close friends with him. Zukofsky's involvement with the short-lived Objectivist movement, ushered in for a 1931 issue of *Poetry*, provided a group of poets, like George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff, with an outlet to pursue what Zukofsky termed in an introduction to the issue as the perfect representation of "historical and contemporary

particulars" (*Prepositions+ 12*). But the two most prominent writers to applaud Zukofsky's

work at this early stage, who would be his most-discussed interlocutors, were the high

modernists Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. The bulk of scholarship on Zukofsky

comes from the decades after his death in 1978, and it was not until the mid-1990's with

works by critics such as Bob Perelman, Peter Quartermain, and Charles Bernstein that truly

productive scholarship commenced. However, Pound had published prose discussing his

work as early as 1933. Addressing Zukofsky, alongside Basil Bunting and Marianne Moore,

Pound asserts in a review of the *Active Anthology* that the distaste for Zukofsky's work is

"due to haste" and that "Zukofsky, Bunting and Miss Moore are all thoughtful, much more so

than the public desires" (Pound 399-400). As one of the earliest references to his poetry, this

critique by Pound is a poignant indicator of the trajectory of Zukofsky scholarship to the

present, when scholars still spend most of their energy in the attempt to assert what it is

Zukofsky is even describing.

In a less public fashion, there is an abundance (far too much to detail here) of both

praise and criticism given by Williams in the letters he exchanged with Zukofsky. In close to

four decades of correspondence, Williams gives constant feedback on the development of

"A" until his death in 1963, and the publication of these letters provides an unparalleled

source of insight into the revision of the poem, as well as Williams' own praise and critique

of the work. In a letter from February 1937, Williams writes to Zukofsky: "I think you are

doing an important thing and doing it with surprising skill and persistence. But don't expect

the mountain to come to you – in the form of a public demonstration. I know you don't

expect that" (*Williams/Zukofsky* 245). Williams and Pound, the two early champions of his

work, also serve as the most common comparisons or touchstones for reckoning with the

difficulty of Zukofsky's work. It must be noted here that these two figures, although they did indeed provide significant personal contributions to the poem, did not issue a prescriptive aesthetic model for Zukofsky to adopt. I believe that this work is crucial in in a biographical sense, that Pound and Williams bore great influence on the young Zukofsky, but Rachel DuPlessis's *Purple Passages* or Sandra Stanley's *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of American Poetics*, and especially the former, treat him more or less as a facet of the study of Pound or Williams. Zukofsky's engagement with writers before his time is too broad to be limited to these two poets/

L.S. Dembo's essay "Louis Zukofsky: Objectivist Poetics and the Quest for Form" offers an example of criticism concerning *"A"* prior to its completion in 1974, giving some insight into the state of (the relatively sparse) scholarship on Zukofsky during his lifetime. Although his reading is not as extensive as later scholarship, the timeliness of his analysis is useful in contextualizing the progression of depth in the scholarship concerning Zukofsky, but only in a speculative sense. Dembo also conducted one of the only printed interviews with Zukofsky. This interview is referenced in almost every study of Zukofsky as a point of clarification for some of his artistic aims, but it is ironically important for the way Zukofsky eschews the responsibility of explaining his own work, even to Dembo, responding at one point to a question concerning the structure of *"A"*: "I don't know about the structure of *"A"*. I don't care how you consider it" (*Prepositions+* 246).

Even the most comprehensive study of *"A"* to date continues to eschew that responsibility. Ahearn takes as his project not the task of systematically analyzing the entirety of *"A"*, as he writes "This book is not a guide to the poem; no one knows enough about *"A"* to write one. It is rather a history of the poem's growth" (xi). The humble task of

tracking the development of Zukofsky's poem was the first book of its kind and remained the

only until a later biography/critical study on Zukofsky was published by Mark Scroggins

(*The Poem of a Life* 2007).

Ahearn groups the poem's 24 movements into four sections by what he sees as the

major thrust of each section: 1-7 ("the self cut loose from the family circle and an ancient,

cohesive culture"); 8-12 ("the poet examines and creates connections between past and

present, specifically the relation of himself and his poem to history and literary tradition");

13-20 ("catalogues mingled disasters and good fortune"); and 21-24 ("expands to a

comprehensive view of personal, human, and natural history") (Ahearn xi-xii).

While Ahearn's reading of *"A"* is admittedly cursory, it does provide the first

reading-through of the entire poem. Not every section is given equal attention, but this is a

necessity when summarizing a poem that resists comprehension. The entanglement of

biographical and literary analysis is a more nuanced and multifaceted means of

understanding the poem structurally and thematically, as opposed to explaining away the

work line-by-line *solely* through biographical information. However, Zukofsky himself may

have been dismayed at the turn to the biographical in a poem that is self-sufficient. He says to

Dembo in their interview, quoting his poem, "The Old Poet Moves to a New Apartment 14

Times," "All the questions here are answered with their own words…" (*Prepositons+* 233).

Sandra Stanley's book *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of American Poetics*

serves as the most extensive study centered on Zukofsky's literary relationships, both within

his personal reading of past figures, as well as those he knew personally, like Pound and

Williams. Perhaps the most significant aspect of Stanley's book is the way in which she

historicizes Zukofsky's work not only within these aforementioned relationships, but through

his reading practices and responses to figures such as Marx, Spinoza, and, most significantly,

Henry Adams, the subject of Zukofsky's master's thesis at Columbia, which was completed

in 1922. By putting Zukofsky's reading to the forefront of the study (it is the first chapter),

Stanley contextualizes his writing within the long tradition in which he sought to be seen, not

only as the next step of an evolving modernist poetics. However, the methodology of her

book is primarily biographical and bibliographic; it is less of a reading of Zukofsky than it is

a cataloguing of what he read.

Many scholars of Zukofsky take up the task of rendering the poem into something

more readable through the explication of his often-impenetrable prosody, or else they bask in

the complexity of his work and perform readings that only further complicate the contents of

his work. In the vein of the former, Bob Perelman, in *The Trouble with Genius*, calls for an

allegorical reading of Zukofsky, in the form of reading *"A"* on the basis of musical qualities,

not simply literary ones. Perelman argues that Zukofsky's legacy rests in the musicality of

his work, and so to understand *"A"* one must reckon with the tension therein between the

linguistic and the sonic. This emphasis on the actual aural quality of Zukofsky's work and

not merely its resemblances to musical forms offers a unique departure in musical readings of

"A". Perelman's reading is one of the few that does seek to understand the ways in which

Zukofsky's poem *works*, as opposed to only addressing the meaning which may be lying

dormant within the text. His assertion that "Zukofsky's relation to certain artists – Pound,

Cavalcanti, Catullus, Bach – is allegorical in the sense that he identifies with their

achievements and tries to constitute them in his own work by means of various displacements

rather than simple imitation" affords Zukofsky the position of an autonomous author creating

original work *alongside* the famous artistic figures of history, rather than that of some literary

torch-bearer (Perelman 173-4). The opening of "A"-1 calls for this in its own way, with the description of the poet experiencing the work of Bach, and I take Perelman's reading as a rare instance of opening up a reading of Zukofsky on his own terms, an example for how further productive readings of *"A"* should be conducted.

Another instance in the group of works devoted to prosodic technique is Joseph Conte's *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry*, which is a devoted and detailed study of the forms of postmodern poetry, as well as one of the few studies that identifies Zukofsky as a postmodernist, and not simply a modernist. This assertion opens up a reading of Zukofsky that helps to set him apart from the modernists like Pound and T.S. Eliot, not just as a disciple of the two, allowing Zukofsky to occupy a space outside of their shadow, and affording him the critical agency to depart from the tendencies of modernist poetry toward something truly revolutionary that is capable of producing new meaning. When scholars like DuPlessis rely so heavily on the kind of comparison Zukofsky has drawn to Pound, their readings of his poetic methods bottleneck, so that Zukofsky's most potentially innovative work may go unaddressed because it is not relevant to the study of the poet's to which he is compared. Conte's study enables scholarship to escape the patterns of this kind of work by treating Zukofsky on his own terms.

Conte's focus on poetic form is the thrust of the book, and he details several categories of form and their relation to the postmodern poets like Zukofsky, John Ashberry, Robert Creeley, and Lorine Niedecker. The forms discussed in relation to Zukofsky's poetry are mainly the sestina, the canonic poem, and the fugue. By exploring the use of these tropes in Zukofsky's work, Conte is able to contextualize Zukofsky within long poetic traditions while simultaneously arriving at the heart of their postmodern characteristics: the upending

of tradition, sense, form. Conte, like Perelman, provides one of the few readings which truly

emphasizes the musical quality of *"A"* by comparing it to the musical forms of the fugue and

the canon. These two tropes, while discussed as formalist techniques, point to the possibility

of reading the techniques of fugue and canon in relation to Zukofsky's concerns of

historiography. This mindset puts Zukofsky on the same plane as all of the poets with which

he interacts in his texts, as Perelman suggests, and the result is the possibility of considering

Zukofsky as a kind of contemporary to his influences and the interlocutors of *"A"*. In order

to read *"A"* against the grain of linear historical narrative, it is necessary to alter the

consideration of Zukofsky as merely the last in a line of poets that build upon each other in a

single, continuous trajectory, and instead read Zukofsky as one poet in a heap of poets, much

like *"A"* functions as a heap of words, not a string of them.

Peter Quartermain's *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to

Susan Howe* focuses on the concept of disruption in Zukofsky's work, and approaches, in

several chapters, the various methods and scales on which Zukofsky is disrupting the

traditions of poetic technique. In the chapter *"Finnegan's Wake* and Middle and Late

Zukofsky" Quartermain focuses on the influence of Joyce on Zukofsky, and takes up a

microscopically-close reading, which deals mostly with the beginning of "A" – 22, "AN

ERA / ANY TIME / OF YEAR," and the combinatorial etymological (mainly Greek and

Latin) and homophonic play; Quartermain identifies Joyce as an important interlocutor

(along with Lewis Carrol) with Zukofsky's kaleidoscopic verse, and the multiplication of

meaning when reading *"A"* the way that Zukofsky read Joyce.

Quartermain considers the form of *"A"* as a whole – its 24 movements marked by

ruptures in theme, form, and content. Reading the form on this scale, he concludes, "[*"A"*]

will, if we have the patience, change the way we think, for such is the effect of mischief and play" (69). For example, Quartermain determines that "[t]he smoothness of form that marks "A" – 9 as a whole covers a radical shift in Zukofsky's own thought: the break from Marx, hereon absent, and the entrance of family, hereon central. And, with this, a major and formal shift, from the propositional to the meditative" (60). By recognizing this seismic shift in the structure of the poem, Quartermain asserts that the poem opens itself up to the "complexities of interrelationship, and his aim is to achieve a simultaneity of multiples, political, aesthetic, historical, economic, linguistic" (61).

Furthermore, in addressing the scope of *"A"* which typically results with the reductionist conclusion of comparing it to the range of *The Cantos*, Quartermain argues against the overwhelming influence of Pound, which he characterizes as "the academic custom of accommodating itself to anything new in literature by reading it in terms of 'influences' rather than struggling with the writing on its own terms" (63). Instead, he identifies the unwieldy final movements of *"A"*, as an example of Zukofsky's "instantaneous" nature, *against* Pound's totalistic aims in *The Cantos* (63). Relating Zukofsky's "work with syllables" to the likes of writers Joyce, Apollinaire, and Stein, Quartermain's conclusion that, "Dense, concentrated, baffling in the playfulness of its syntax and puns, beautiful in its music, and in its sheer lyric passages," *"A"* poses the potential for a fruitful reading Zukofsky's epic that acknowledges but upends the poetry which came before it, and therefore seeks to establish Zukofsky outside of the mere consideration of his work as a "product" of the poets before him (69). Although at times the extent of his Joycean reading of *"A"* begins to miss the forest for the trees, I take Quartermain's work as an example of the kind of close reading necessary to open up the way that *"A"* engenders continuous

production of meaning, rather than serving as a puzzle waiting to be solved. An important note of Quartermain's is the commonality of colonial language in the works of Zukofsky and Joyce, and this subject is one I take up later in regards to the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the "minor language."

While the majority of the previous scholarship concerning Zukofsky is valuable in their contributions to a minor author, what is most significant is the gaps in said scholarship. In some places, a significant aspect of Zukofsky's writing is gestured toward but not explored fully, and these gaps are what shape the mode of inquiry in this project. Perelman's nod to the allegorical in *"A"* is most helpful in its recognition of the possibility of reading Zukofsky alongside his predecessors and not just a product of them or a case study in divergence from dominant modes of the poetic avant-garde.

Although not addressing *"A"* itself, poet and critic Charles Bernstein, who also wrote the introduction to Zukofsky's *Selected Poems*, addresses Zukofsky in an essay on homophonic translation, in which Bernstein mentions the homophonic reworking of the poetry of Catullus done by both Celia and Louis Zukofsky. Echoing Walter Benjamin's theories of translation, Bernstein asserts that "Homophonic translation is significant because it can symbolize the revenge of the translator: no longer invisible through the text's opacity making the "original" invisible" (66). These translations privilege the sound of the original over the translation of lexical meaning, and while the Catullus translations are not a part of *"A"*, this same reading applies also to the same kind of translations found in the epic. "A"-21, for instance, is a similar rewriting of *Rudens* by the Roman author Plautus, and there are additional examples throughout the poem, such as the translating of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in "A"-23. This project is not concerned entirely with the practice of

translation/transformation in Zukofsky's work, though it will address these themes as they are relevant, primarily to "A"-21. But what is most useful in reading Bernstein's essay is the treatment of historical material in contemporary writing: the ways in which the present voice *sounds out* works of the past and reformulates them to a current historical and political moment. Bernstein's methodology, in this essay and the other essays of *Attack of the Difficult Poems*, serves as a guiding principle in this reading *"A"*.

Methodology/Conclusion

Considering these trends in scholarship, it seems that a different kind of reading *"A"* is in order, though I owe scholarly debt to Perelman, Quartermain, and Bernstein, in particular. In his essay "On the Concept of History," Walter Benjamin writes of the issues of historicism and the problems of viewing the past as a continuum. His invocation of a work by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus* (1920)*,* is a useful image for considering the position of the epic poem and its author in relation to the history it seeks to represent. Of the angel, Benjamin writes, "His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet" (392). Unlike *The Cantos*, which do privilege this chain of events, Zukofsky's interaction with historical materialism and historiography are akin to the concerns expressed by Benjamin in this essay, and in many ways *"A"* functions as this "single catastrophe." Its monumentality, difficulties of interpretation, and shifting nature render *"A"* as a kind of microcosm of the problem with which it is dealing, and therefore I can see no better source of study for this problem of

historical representation and the ways in which Zukofsky turns his engagement with that history into a poetics that both acknowledges and absorbs the past while putting forth radically new ways of looking back at it.

The philosophical thought and reading practices developed by French poststructuralist Gilles Deleuze provide a suitable framework for reinterpreting Zukofsky's language at the point for which he calls. The works by Deleuze that are primarily relevant are his collection of literary "case studies" *Essays Clinical and Critical* (1993), as well as his collaborative writings with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and *What is Philosophy?* (1991). Deleuze's work and the ways in which it departs from "traditional" readings of classic philosophical texts by Nietzsche, Kant, Freud, and Marx serve as an excellent model for performing a similarly untraditional reading of the rather cryptic and diversely-interpreted work of Zukofsky.

In terms of concepts, the primary relevant terminology put forth by Deleuze in relation to this project are his concepts of 1) the dissolution of the subject, 2) the minorization of politics (derived from the work *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, also written with Guattari), and 3) the stuttering of language, all tendencies identified by editor Daniel Smith in his introduction to *Essays Clinical and Critical* (Smith xxiv). The other works serve as models of reading texts as sites of meaning-production and not vessels for static meaning, explored in his book on Proust. Following William Carlos Williams decree that a poem is a "small (or large) machine made of words," through these practices I read Zukofsky's work for its machinic properties, to analyze the way the poem works through, produces, and troubles language as operating in a state of equilibrium, rather than interpreting the difficulties in what his language does to convey a narrative arc. I contend that

this method will afford an approach to *"A"* that is lacking in scholarship which merely reads Zukofsky's difficult language as an end in itself.

First, this project will put forth the idea that Zukofsky's work, as he urged in a letter to Babette Deutsch, should be read literally (*"A"* viii). This is not a poem that merely strives for some kind of aesthetic prowess but is showing the seams of language and its capacities. It is thus necessary to read his language not solely through the allegorical lenses employed by previous scholars. The language must be read for what it does, not what it means or contains or refers to. This is indicated in Zukofsky's reluctance to respond candidly to many of Dembo's questions; almost all his responses point back to a reading of the poem, either by Zukofsky's compelling readers to read closer or by quoting the poems directly back at the interviewer, resisting the call to explain his own work.

This project is one concerned with how the past is internalized in Zukofsky construction of a poetic subjectivity. In keeping with that concern, the surprising lack of recognition in Zukofsky scholarship on the resonances between *"A"* and Benjamin's notion of history and historiography provides the organizing principle of my analysis. In recognizing this resonance, we might address the role that Zukofsky's own reading of the past plays in his writing, instead of considering him as a "present" individual sitting outside of the implications of events passed or current. For instance, in "A"-6, Zukofsky outlines his guidelines for poetic representation:

> My one voice. My other: is
> An objective – rays of the object brought to a focus,
> An objective – nature as creator – desire
>   for what is objectively perfect
> Inextricably the direction of historic and
>   contemporary particulars.
>
> J.S.B: a particular,

His Matthew Passion, a particular (*"A"* 24)

These "particulars," are the historical objects that Zukofsky takes as his subject; their representation is the primary focus of his writing. His writing is responding to and re-presenting the objects of the past, whether these objects are works of art, in the case of music and literature, or actual events that have served as monolithic markers in history, as monuments.

The role of history-telling is common in the epic poem, which is exhibited in poems as old as *The Iliad* all the way to *The Cantos*. From the ancient epics accounting for the origin of a people, such as the *Aeneid,* or Milton's *Paradise Lost* telling the story of the Fall (human history), to modern examples such as Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* accounting for 400 years of history in the town of Gloucester, Massachusetts, the epic poem has long been the mode for definitively laying claim to the arrival of a current moment. For Zukofsky, the poetic inspiration comes from the connection made between historical distant moments, rather than the desire to record a single, linear history.

In the case of *"A"*, it is the poet seeing a performance of the Matthew Passion, "Composed seventeen twenty-nine, / Rendered at Carnegie Hall, / Nineteen twenty-eight" that inspires the poet to begin the work (*"A"* 1-2). The historical object, in this case music, is a poetic foundation very different from the broader historical concerns of the epics mentioned above, corresponding to Benjamin's notion of the "dialectical image." Howard Eiland's introduction to the English translation of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* addresses this concept, and although he writes only of its relevance to Benjamin's opus, the concept is uncannily suited to a characterization of the treatment of the historical object in *"A"*. Eiland writes,

the historical object of interpretation: that which, under the divinatory gaze of the

collector, is taken up into the collector's own particular time and place, thereby

throwing a pointed light on what has been. Welcomed into the present moment that

seems to be waiting just for it—"actualized," as Benjamin likes to say—the moment

from the past comes alive as never before in this way, the "now" is itself experienced

as preformed in the "then," as its distillation—thus the leading motif of precursors in

the text. The historical object is reborn as such into a present day capable of receiving

it, of suddenly "recognizing" it (Benjamin xii)

This is what Benjamin terms the "now of recognizability" (*Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*), and the

interplay between past and present, the resistance of the urge to look back on the past without

acknowledging the role of the vantage point in how we evaluate history.

This is exactly how Zukofsky figures his treatment of historical material, or the

"common air," which he characterizes as

Events listening to their own tremors.
Beings and no more than breath
                                between them
Histories, differences, walls,
And the words which bind them no more than
"So that," "and" –
The thought in the melody moves – (*"A"* 27)

Like Benjamin, Zukofsky does not read the history as a causal chain; the connections shift in

eye of the beholder, and across time those association will typically change. The duration of

the poem's composition makes this all the more interesting because there is a record of one

poet's shifting historical perspective across almost fifty years. The events and objects of

interest change, as do "the words which bind them." He is roaming the halls of artifacts,

ignoring anachronism and putting things together only as they make sense to him in the

present moment. The task for the reader of *"A"*, then, is to begin sifting through these artifacts, to attempt to make sense of them as they did perhaps only to Zukofsky.

This is a resistance of monolithic memory and representation, as well as aesthetic tradition. Bernstein argues, "In place of the sometimes overwhelming monumentalism of "*the*" great poem, Zukofsky emphasized the need for "*a*" series of poems. He rejected the major key for the minor chords, universals for particulars, the grandiose for discreteness" (*Pitch of Poetry* 100) [1]. His emphasis on particularity is precisely the kind of undoing of the monolithic that enables rupturing the stolid representations which make up the definite "the". Referring to Bernadette Mayer's *Memory* and *Studying Hunger*, Paul Stephens identifies an attempt "to reconfigure memory so as to be able to think "without remembering" – that is, to reveal underlying structures of memory so as to resist static patterns of recollection" and that this "accumulation becomes a kind of anti-style that refuses to keep secrets" (123). I would contend that Zukofsky's work, too, resists stagnant recollection or reproduction, and by including so many artifacts of memory and nostalgia, both cultural and personal, is reconfiguring the ways in which a history may be written or, better yet, unwritten.

For example, Zukofsky's plea to "let me live here ever, / sweet now" at the outset of "A"-22 calls for that embrace of the now, to exist not within the reproductions of the past but to live in the time of creation, which may only occur in the present (508). This perching of the poet, looking back, is reminiscent of the angel of Klee interpreted by Benjamin: it is not the task of the poet to rehash old forms, but to create these things new. Apart from poetic obligation, the individual as a present body should not be subjected to live in some interim

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[1] Zukofsky's first published poem was in part a parody of Eliot's *Waste Land*, entitled *Poem Beginning "The"*. The shift from his first major work's use of the definitive "The" to the indeterminacy of *"A"*, while only a matter of title, is an apt illustration of many larger shifts in Zukofsky's style towards the specific and serial, as exhibited in *80 Flowers*.

between historical moments and images but be free to live and create, constituted of the past but not necessarily defined by it.

But the call to "live here ever" is not so simple: to live "(where?) dig or not / piece dig who with what / what with" represents confusion with where to begin living now (510). This is an illustration of the aforementioned heap. Where does one start to dig? How to begin? Searching for what? The task of dredging up the past is one riddled with dangers, but, as the poet asks, "little horse can you speak"?: "won't know till it speaks" and thus the answer may only be found in the doing, may not be premeditated or predicted until its arrival (511).

Along with the philosophy of Benjamin, the work of Gilles Deleuze, as well as his collaborations with Félix Guattari, serves as an important touchstone for this reading, as his concepts enable a reading of Zukofsky's language that has not yet been approached in scholarship. While I have addressed the broader practice of reading *"A"* for its machinic properties – a practice encouraged by the methodology of their work *A Thousand Plateaus* – the most important of Deleuze's concepts to this reading is the stuttering of language, first put forth in the essay "He Stuttered," from *Essays Clinical and Critical*.

Deleuze begins the essay by invoking the stutter of Melville's Billy Budd, noting that the compositional technique invoked in the title, to say what the character is doing falls short of the possibility of when "saying it is doing it," allowing for the moment in which "It is no longer the character who stutters in speech; it is the writer who becomes a stutterer in language. He makes the language as such stutter: an affective and intensive language, and no longer an affectation of the one who speaks" (107).

This break between the effectuation of real speech and the tension within the language system itself serves as an incredibly useful model for reading the apparent incoherence of much of Zukofsky's writing, as in "A"-23's "Ye nó we see hay / io we hay we see / hay io we sée no" (539). In this passage we encounter a language with no ready semantic meaning, but perhaps it puts forth a language that, rather than seeking to emulate "authentic" speech, seeks to emulate a "pure" language, a poetry which, as Heidegger posits in his essay "Language," is the best place to start a study of the ways in which language itself speaks.

By reading Zukofsky's work alongside Deleuze's concept of stuttering, we begin to see in *"A"* the showing of a disequilibrium in language, as Deleuze terms it. The truncation of syntax in Zukofsky's work, the incessant confusion of parts of speech with discontinuous, unpunctuated clauses, indistinguishable from one another, puts into question even the simplest kind of linguistic or semantic clarity. Deleuze argues that "if the system appears in perpetual disequilibrium or bifurcation, if each of its terms in turn passes through a zone of continuous variation then the language itself will begin to vibrate and stutter, but without being confused with speech, which never assumes more than one variable position among others, or moves in more than one direction" (108). Zukofsky's language does indeed boom and crash, upsetting a linear flow of narrative into a fractured, fleeing fragments of words which represent "*the outside* of language" (112).

I will explore the resulting quality of this crash as one of disintegration, which follows the opposite process of integration leading up to the final movement of *"A"*.

The last portion of "He Stuttered" invokes the larger project pursued by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka* through the concept of a minor literature. Deleuze writes that what writers

like Kafka, Beckett, and, by my estimate, Zukofsky, do "is invent a *minor* use of a major language within which they express themselves entirely; they *minorize* this language, much as in music, where the minor mode refers to dynamic combinations in perpetual disequilibrium… they make the language, they send it racing to the witch's line, ceaselessly placing it in a state of disequilibrium… following an incessant modulation" (109) The racing speed of sections "A"-22/23 play this tendency out to its logical end, giving history without narrative, employing language like paint in a Pollock work. What we are given is a language that collapses on itself and gives birth to a new one, for we know all the words used by Zukofsky but have never heard them in quite this manner, even when the words have been sourced from elsewhere. Zukofsky is a practitioner of defamiliarization, not only of words but of history as well.

 "A" is the kind of text that exemplifies the urge to create something all-encompassing is described in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* as "the total work, all combinations *inside* the book, the tree-book, the cosmos-book: all of these platitudes so dear to the avant-gardes, which cut the book off from its relations with the outside, are even worse than the chant of the signifier (127). This "chant of the signifier" is the sign that rules despite its removal from the actual; it is a purely virtual sign. The text most emblematic of the total work for Deleuze and Guattari is the Bible, the text that seeks to explain the entire universe. However, they identify the same tendencies of the Bible in modern writing as well, "Wagner, Mallarmé, and Joyce, Marx and Freud: still Bibles," and argue that "[i]f passional delusion is profoundly monomaniacal, monomania for its part found a fundamental element of its assemblage in monotheism and the Book" (127). This adherence to the singularity, the thing which encompasses all by retreating from the affects that surround it, is a politically

dangerous scenario. The reverence to the monomaniacal text is problematic by virtue of its solipsism; the text resists interaction, necessitates the priestly explanation, and as Benjamin writes this text runs the "danger of becoming the tool of the ruling class" (391). These are texts that cut themselves off from the world without, and therefore render themselves as uninterpretable to the public.

What is needed, then, is a work full of holes, a work that offers an escape and resists authoritative interpretation, and Deleuze and Guatarri's model, established in their concepts as well as in the construction of their book on the whole, provides a means of analyzing *"A"* as much on philosophical terms as those literary. While *"A"* seems to fall into this category of the "tree-book", I contend that it is, in fact, a work which offers a way out, pointing in every direction across time and outside language. Its stuttering "is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree" (Deleuze 111). In fact, in certain sections the poem even offers instructions for reading, resisting the need for the priest-interpreter, "Attentive as / good: no prophet no poet" (511). Zukofsky urges us to read closely; there is no need for external interpretation.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this project is concerned primarily with movements 22 and 23 of Zukofsky's *"A"*. These two movements follow the same form, which consists of 1,000 lines, with five words for each line. Using this symmetrical form, both movements gloss over and index thousands of years of history. In "A"-22 the geological and political history of an eon are rifled through/rearranged, and in "A"-23 we see the progression of literary language over

centuries of various traditions of writing, including a homophonic translation of the Epic of

Gilgamesh.

The rationale behind this grouping, aside from their mirrored forms, is that the pairing

allows for an extended analysis of the work which exemplifies the height of Zukofsky's

style. The drastic truncation of syntax, the way the language seems to skip and trip over

itself, is at once a culminating feature of Zukofsky's poetic trajectory *and* a technique of

transmitting his philosophies about history and historiography. The first unbroken section of

"A"-22 begins,

> Late later and much later
> Surge sea erupts boiling molten
> Lava island from ice, land
> Seen into color thru day
> And night: voiced, once unheard
> Earth beginning idola of years
> That love well forget late.
>   "A"-22 (511)

These sections both articulate in their forms the way histories are used, but simultaneously

problematize this use through their approaching of the upper limit of value when these

characteristics are carried out to their logical end. By beginning with the skipping ahead of

some vast, indeterminate period, Zukofsky highlights the necessity to glossing over

incomprehensible swaths of time. Yet within only a few lines, we see the presence of a

human enter, once it is "seen," and there is thus a collision of the purely geological, non-

human phenomena with the emergence of a seeing eye that creates the "idola", or the first

moment of human recreation and representation in the budding landscape. Similarly, "A"-23

opens with the musing on the "world worn in whose / happiest reins preempt their histories"

which views this history as nothing more than an organizing factor, a way in which "*and's /

compound creature and creature together*" (536).

Without falling into the same trope of automatically pairing Zukofsky's work with that of Pound, I do think some actual reading of the portrayal or act of history writing in *The Cantos*, as another example of an epic would be useful in delineating the unique way in which Zukofsky handles the problem of comprehensively recounting the historical. For instance, the "inscription" at the beginning of "A"-22 reads, "AN ERA / ANY TIME / OF YEAR" (508). This ambiguous and indeterminate opening to a poem depicting a linear history presents a distinct view from Pound's poem, which seeks to include all of a history in a more specific manner of academic certainty, as in the case of its opening with a paraphrasing of Homer's *Odyssey* which seems to say that this poem begins with the beginning of Western literature. In *Pitch of Poetry*, Charles Bernstein characterizes "A"-22 as a "valentine tercet, made with nine vowels and nine consonants that concatenate multiple plays on *era/anno/aer/are*, and on *a/an/any,* and also on *year/ear*… a round of these six words shows the care in all to come anon" (109). This opening is, as Quartermain suggests, a concise illustration of the sheer possibility of linguistic play in reading Zukofsky's work: an "instant entirety."

This chapter is where the primary application and analysis of Deleuze and his concept of a stuttering language will apply. Zukofsky's language and its breakneck speed, simultaneously displays the kind of self-awareness in language that Deleuze advocates, as well as providing a potential solution to the problem of recounting a history that cannot be contained in a single volume. This method employs two categories that require dissection: 1) the curation of historical content and 2) the presentation of that content.

It is in this sense that we may read *"A"* not as a story but as a kind of museum. This is, however, not to say that the museum fixes the problems posed by written histories, but it

does maintain an awareness of discontinuity that is absent in many of these historical accounts and ever-present in the work of Zukofsky. One example of this trope in *"A"* is the use of a kind of ekphrastic writing, as in the elegy to William Carlos Williams in "A"-17 which contains an almost indistinguishable amount of Williams' own writing folded into that of Zukofsky. This serves as a reminder that this is a poem of a life, not an absent narrator reflecting on the past. It is as Benjamin writes, not a recognition of "the way it really was" but "a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger" (391). Zukofsky is not walking backwards through history but sifting through the images of this memory at an urgent historical moment and piling them up.

Chapter II – "To answer with the knowledge of history I have": "A"-21 & 24 and Historical Interaction

The second chapter deals with movements "A"-21 and "A"-24. While 22/23 follow an identical pattern of form, 21/24 are less concerned with prosodic form than with the function of non-poetic structures like theatre and music, respectively. "A"-21 is a homophonic translation of *Rudens* by 3rd century B.C. Roman playwright Plautus. The plot summary provided at the outset of "A"-21 serves as an apt indicator of the kind of disjointed engagement with Plautus' original text that Zukofsky is performing, as it reads "fisheRman's sea net dragged Up a leathery wicker / rattling the baby's charms of his master's Daughter / a leno had kidnapped for his slave brothEl" (438). "A"-24 is a musical setting of Zukofsky's past works (including those outside of *"A"*) as the libretto to the music of Handel harpsicord pieces and consists of almost 250 pages. "A"-24 is by far the most ambitious piece of Zukofsky's writing (See Fig. 1), primarily in the complicated matter of whether or not to

consider it the writing of Zukofsky at all, as its lyrics do not come entirely from *"A"* and the whole section was "composed" not by Louis, but his wife Celia as a gift.

T   And   it   is   possible   in   imagination

D   I came thru there   My mother hit her mother?
      (points finger downward, moves his head negatively from side to side)

S   This story was a story of our time.

P   Blest   /   Infinite   things   /

Fig. 1 – Page one of "A"-24 ("A" 566)

While first chapter deals with the aspect of historical representation, this chapter, considering "A"-21/24 alongside one another, is concerned with the interaction that occurs between historical material and the contemporary individual engaging with that history, as Benjamin writes of the angel of history. This is a matter present as early as "A"-1 when the poet writes, while seeing a performance of Bach's *Passion of St. Matthew*,

> The Passion According to Matthew,
> Composed seventeen twenty-nine,
> Rendered at Carnegie Hall,
> Nineteen twenty-eight,
> Thursday evening, the fifth of April.
> <div align="center">"A"-1 (1)</div>

This concern over the collapsed time between creation and encounter is a reoccurring theme of *"A"*, where history and the present come in contact. These are moments of collision, and this section traces these moments of collision as a central premise of the construction of *"A"*. Whereas "A"-22/23 display the particular prosodic style of Zukofsky, 21 and 24 display the more conceptual and theoretical aspects of the poem's concern with history. They represent the transition from a purely detached historical method to a personal one. By "sounding out" the original Latin in his own English, Zukofsky effectively collapses these two distant

historical moments together as a means of making *Rudens* new, to borrow Pound's phrase, which not only translates the work, but multiplies it.

In the same sense, "A"-24 displays the interaction with history. Zukofsky is not indebted to Handel, not anymore, because they have become collaborators, and their work appears together on the same page. This is not reflective history because Zukofsky has moved away from simply recounting the productions of the past and shunned the historiographic attempts to detach the scribe from the material. Here Zukofsky is an active participant and by collapsing the gap in time to accommodate his own work folding in Handel's he resists the continuum that Benjamin warns against and engages with the historical material not as an act of recording but as an act of creation and renewal. The analysis of "A"-24 is centered on the ways in which the movement exhibits a kind of escape-work. Through this methodology, Zukofsky turns away from Pound's model of a "poem containing history," where the poem seeks to circumscribe history *within* the poem, towards a mean of escaping the poem as a device of delimitation, with a poetic subject that seeks to connect itself to history rhizomatically at every possible point and moment. In this analysis I incorporate another poem, Tan Lin's *7 Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004: The Joys of Cooking*, as a comparable poetic-theoretical model in order to hypothesize and clarify the potential for a poetics which attempts, by highlighting its artificial nature, to erase its own boundaries between it and the external world and begin to *work* as a part of that machine and not only distantly refer to or comment on it.

Coda

To conclude the discussion of the final movements of *"A"* is a movement out of the poem and into the final collection published during Zukofsky's lifetime*, 80 Flowers*. In order to extend the conclusions drawn from the exegesis of *"A"* to a more holistic perspective, *80 Flowers* serves as an ideal concluding case study into the culmination of Zukofsky's later poetics and thematic concerns, from the Marxist themes of "A"-9 to the almost totally hermetic and personal thrust of "A"-24. The collection consists of eighty poems, each eight lines and five words per line, with each poem corresponding to a flower from Celia Zukofsky's garden in their home. This movement into the totally hermetic, personal life of the poet is an illustration of the trajectory towards the personal throughout the progression of *"A"* and to provide a reading of some of these poems as a final look into the poet's culminating work offers the opportunity to in some ways conclude a reading of *"A"*. In doing so, I hope to provoke some consideration of further work do be pursued in this vein.

The work, as an anthology, feeds into itself somewhat with the subject of flowers. The Greek *anthos* refers to a flower, and anthology initially referred to a collection of flowers. The cooccurrence of these themes, in a structural sense, makes *80 Flowers* an antithesis to the encyclopedic tendencies of *"A"*. If *"A"*, which is ordered from A-Z ("A" through "Zion"), represents the condensing of information in order to account for everything, then *80 Flowers*, as an anthology in structure and content, emphasizes the act of selection and curation. This tendency which is present in the organization of the poem also manifests in the writing itself. For instance, the poem "Windflower" details only one of these eighty flowers:

> *Windflower* overworld selvageflame sun coddle
> lay dune ass toss opt

> thrown own candle urge shade
> unhated unloved unseen slight bud
> windflower singled erst field-lily nods
> unshaded whorled th'solitary flower suns
> clouds summers asleep crowfoots spring-*rue*
> *anemone* leaves flowers both earth (*Collected Shorter Poetry*)

It is clear that the poem lacks any kind of syntactical continuity and seems to be, if anything, a composite of mostly nouns and adjectives. But what at first-glance seems to be nonsense is precisely what is effective in this piece, for the lack of distinct clauses necessitates a kind of impressionistic reading of the affects produced by the images, which may combine with each other in any number of ways. For instance, "*anemone* leaves flowers" indicates at the same time three consecutive nouns, as well as noun, verb, object, and without the syntactical ambiguity afforded by the morphology of the English language this kind of linguistic free-play would be unavailable. Zukofsky would have had to sacrifice scope for clarity, and it is precisely this tension between comprehension and brevity with which Zukofsky is able to cope because of the methods of his truncation. "Windflower" points to the description of a thing unknown, "unhated unloved unseen," yet all the same it is still depicted. The sensation of the flower being hidden and unacknowledged is indicative of the optics toward any external phenomena; the range of botanical information of the plant, its potential cultural connotations, its symbolic significance in the arts, etc., must be dodged in order to get at the thing itself. One could spend a lifetime learning of the single plant and its outward extending web of association, but instead Zukofsky offers the brief glance and the constellate description.

Zukofsky's style, which embraces the ambiguity of interpretation and takes joy in the experimental upheaval of language through "a syntax in the process of becoming, a creation of syntax that gives birth to a foreign language within language, a grammar of

disequilibrium" (Deleuze 112). This poem is, in many ways, the apotheosis of Zukofsky's late poetics, where the sonic and visual aspects of his poetry reach full bloom. The musicality of the line "lay dune ass opt toss" is particularly characteristic of this visual/sonic melding as, for example, "Lay dune" can be read as an affected accent of "lay down." This multiplicity is solidified in the inclusion of "opt" to the line, so that it is the reader who must decide how they are to translate the sound of the poem into sense.

The complex, irregular repetition of sound takes the musical quality out of any traditional form, like those which utilize end rhyme or regular internal rhyme, and reconfigures it from a pulse to an ebb-and-flow. The "thrown own" is one instance of the way rhyming is removed from the structure of the poem and supplanted into a concentrated segment, which gives an emphasis to the rhyme by not diluting it over the course of several lines or stanzas. "Windflower" is at once senselessly musical *and* imagistically rich. The images of "solitary flower suns" and "slight buds" echo the imagery of the Romantic poets, yet their placement within the poem as a whole, with its lack of verbs, renders them quite distinct from those earlier poets. The overall effect is like walking through a museum of all the artifacts relating to a single flower, where Zukofsky employs the tropes of nature poetry without relying on any traditional syntax to connect them. The result is the creation of a new language for the natural world which relies precisely on the tension between familiar images and the unfamiliar poetic musicality used to fashion them together, like a quilt.

The curation of the collection, too, points to a potential out from the issue of comprehensive narrative, as Zukofsky centers the survey around Celia Zukofsky's garden. The selection is thus inherently personal; the specific flowers discussed are only relevant because they are a part of the poet's life. In this sense, *80 Flowers* displays the same

meditation on selective optics exhibited in the second half of *"A"*, as Zukofsky must

prioritize what it is that there is time to see. The Impressionists of the late 19th Century

sought to depict the moment as it flees from the eye; Zukofsky seeks to capture as much

worldly affect as time offers the individual. Zukofsky's description of "north south west east

uncompassed / only sun unshifting wind and / wave return drifted prow home" points to the

point in this history before a total quantification of space by human understanding (513).

This unmapped, uncoordinated space represents a world by which human are baffled and

made small, not a world that is assumed to be totally digested and catalogued. But for

Zukofsky there is no need to hold onto the idyllic past, because there is only ever the present

and future with which to be concerned. Advocating the presence of productive thought, in the

face of an unmanageable and unchangeable history, Zukofsky writes,

> For *now* it is: *not*
> Is the same and can
> Be thought and thought is
> *Now* (*"A"* 517)

The distinction drawn between the thought of the past and the thought that occurs in the

present, the privileged thought, invokes the same thinking presented by Deleuze and Guattari

in the introduction to *What is Philosophy?* (1991). They write that philosophy is not the

reflection, contemplation, or communication of concepts but the creation of those concepts

(Deleuze & Guattari 6). The act of concept-creation necessarily hinges upon past concepts,

but philosophy, as well as the arts or sciences, in answer to the titular question, is thought

now.

Zukofsky's question, "'if your house were burning / what would you save from / it?'

'The fire'" champions in its answer the forces of change and agency (519). The force that

takes down the house must be the affectation worth preserving. It presupposes that the

stagnant, fixed structure is one worth doing away with, and stable bodies, whether domestic

or intellectual, are undesirable. He resists fixed phenomena because that force of change is

the exertion of the will, and the resistance to the fixed body is present in his stylistic

resistance to monolithic meaning.

A typical ambiguity of Zukofsky's work is present in the lines "what is it to be /

water, butterfly or man know / stop by your own action" (520). The breakdown here between

"man" and "know," as clearly something has been glossed and syntactically it makes little

sense. But the fact that it does occur between "man" and "know" speaks to the gulf between

subjectivity, or the man considering the question of what it is to be, and knowledge, that

ability to discern, in this case, between water, butterfly, man. The concern of these lines rests

in the knowing of the self, and in relation to the ongoing discussion of external knowledge

Zukofsky problematizes the stability of humanity in its relations to other life, let alone to the

access to any understanding of that life in historical terms. In *"A"* Zukofsky revisits the

traditional poetic forms of sonnet, sestina, lyrics, and ultimately the epic. But by radically

undoing the necessity for coherence, Zukofsky shows how mind may race through the glut of

data, and merely gestures toward the historical past, but only as it pertains to his own violent,

creative disruption of that very history.

Chapter I

"History a plant that dies": "A"-22/23 and Representation

Louis Zukofsky's later poetics was formally defined by the technique of determining line by word-count, a tendency which is evident from "A"-14 through his final collection, *80 Flowers*. After the composition of "A"-21, Zukofsky typically developed this technique through the five-word line. In "A"-22/23, the five-word line is the vehicle for representing thousands of years of history. The effect of concision produced by this technique completely disrupts the practice of history writing and the constraints inherent to setting history down in text. As an example, a common textbook for classes in the history of Western civilization, Spielvogel's *Western Civilization*, runs 1072 pages in its 8th edition. Regardless of page count, even though a thousand pages is quite a read, the ambition of translating complex historical periods into writing necessitates the omission and curation of material. In order to serve any function to the institutions that require such a text, mainly schools and universities, it needs to present a comprehensible amount of material and to do so in an efficient way. The sources from which many histories derive their information are often unreadable or at least uninteresting, as shipping manifests and court documents are not of general interest. What occurs then is the omission of "unnecessary" material, the stories deemed frivolous or unimportant, and the curation of the remaining material into a condensed, narrativized form.

Historians like Howard Zinn have addressed the first issue, seeking to dredge up the narratives and experiences of those typically ignored by history books – women, people of color, the poor. As Walter Benjamin writes, "The chronicler who narrates events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accord with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history," so that the possibility of hope is

alive for the use of history for those typically buried in it (390). But the latter issue is one that

seems unbreachable in any pragmatic sense, for how can a history be shared without being

translated into a story? It is not that the form is inherently problematic, but that the necessary

editorializing of material to cohere disparate elements of history into either one or a series of

grand-narratives necessarily distorts the relationship between historical events and the

complex material conditions that give rise to them.This impasse is framed by Zukofsky

through a length of line that leaves the majority of the page blank. A book of history can

address the events of 2,000 years in half as many *pages*, and Zukofsky takes on 2,000 years

(or more) in half as many *lines*. He is pushing to its absolute limit the ability of the

methodological practices of curation and omission to convey anything of historical value,

even doing so on a purely formal, structural level. As a result, Zukofsky shows that history

may be represented without narrative altogether, privileging the glut of information to be

accounted for over the coherent curation of that information into a plot-based telling of

history.

   To give an example in the visual arts, in 1978, American abstract painter-sculptor Cy

Twombly completed his ambitious ten-work series of paintings entitled *Fifty Days at Iliam.*

The paintings "depict" the events of the Trojan War as they were rendered by Alexander

Pope in his translation of Homer's *The Iliad*, but with a total absence of any human-figural

elements. Instead, what is given is a series of dense concentrations of oil, crayon, and

graphite accompanied with various linguistic markers of the text: "Hector," "vengeance,"

"Ares," "Like a fire that consumes all before it." The palette consists mainly of deep reds and

blues with penciled scrawling tacked on to an untreated canvas, and the result is a loose

connection with Homer's original at best. Yet this practice begs the question of what is owed

to that original, what kind of proximity to Homer's imagery that Twombly is obligated to uphold if this really is the Troy of *The Iliad*.

A significant choice made by Twombly in this series is his connection to the language of the poem. While the events as they are painted resemble what we might recognize as the Trojan War, Twombly's invocation of the concrete markers of Homer's story – rage, etc. – in a purely linguistic fashion calls attention to his curation of words, and, perhaps more importantly, the spelling. Twombly spells it "Iliam," replacing the "u" of the Latin "Ilium" or the "o" of the Greek "Ilion" with an "a". As an explanation of this decision, an insight rare in Twombly's practice of seclusion, he said that the "a" serves to represent, of course, the hero Achilles. But to alter the spelling is no small detail, let alone in light of an explanation such as this. This act circumscribes the whole story within a single letter, to represent the man, his rage, his people. The inscription, ultimately, manifests itself in a single, bloody triangle[2], a further extrapolation from what was already a reduction of the name to its initial. This palimpsestic method of burying the reference in the metamorphosis, the translation, of that reference places the emphasis on the affect of the story, the nonrepresentational aspects of the tale, flattening to the canvas-plane that whole of history which structures Homer's tale. It gives, using Deleuze's reading of Francis Bacon, "the horror and not the scream." It is not the narrative of the story that is of importance here (the horror) but the sensation of it (the scream), where Twombly depicts the rage and not the war.

What is the effect of this kind of condensation and turn to sensation? Twombly takes the story of Troy and turns it inside of itself. This effect correlates with Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization. Twombly's reorientation and isolation of certain

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[2] See Twombly's *The Vengeance of Achilles* (1962)

symbols, names, chromatic concepts force readerly reinterpretation of one of the most well-known stories of the western world. We would be faulty readers to ignore the source-text because of a perceived gulf between original and adaptation, yet the difficulty of connecting the two is substantial, symbolically linked to a single shift in "a".

But the replacement of "u" for "a" in the title is merely the lower-case echo of foregrounding the figure of Achilles himself as written "character" removed from traditional historical-artistic representation. By tracing the line from "a" to "A" (a literal elevation), Twombly opens up a new consideration of the role that the written, decontextualized word plays in "representational" painting. The result of such a move is the turn of the alphabetic symbol into figure. The focalization of the letter rises into the forefront of the painting, and thus the background of the story runs from sight; it disappears into itself and we are left with the isolated figure of the A. Writing on the tendency in Bacon's paintings to present a single subject without landscape, Gilles Deleuze asserts that stories always arise from "the space between two figures in order to animate the illustrated whole." The isolation of one of these two figures is the simplest way of breaking with representation, narration, and illustration, in order to "liberate the figure: to stick to the fact" (*Francis Bacon* 6). This "betweenness" may exist between subject-figure and background-figure(s), where the relationship of the two allows the viewer to take up certain assumptions about the diegesis of the work, attaching the previously mentioned scream to its instigating horror.

This idea comes to fruition in *Fifty Days at Iliam* by severing the connection between representation, especially of the narrative kind, and affect in *The Iliad*. Realistic depictions of the events of the Trojan War are reduced and isolated across the ten canvases. The complexity of character and plot in Homer become repetitions of blood, the phallic, names,

and Twombly's characteristic frenzy of mark-making on an otherwise empty, dirty, off-white plane. He further reduces the story in the same way that painting reduces reality to two-dimensions.

Twombly, then, is taking the same practice Deleuze identifies in Bacon, most famous for his portraits, and extends it to remove narrative altogether. He leaves only the traces of the human and its activities which, in this case, is the history of war. The palette itself is limited to primary colors in patches, with names and simple geometric shapes in black. Therefore, color, too, is removed from its representational mode, even beyond the ways in which artists like Rothko or the Fauvists had decontextualized color in painting. The geometric shapes are the furthest abstraction of the human figure to line, so that the reality of the human is reduced simply to "shape." In the case of Achilles' transfiguration into the triangle, the person becomes letter, becomes shape, thus becoming-figure through its escape from the in-between static space that connects representation to affect. Because of this, Achilles becomes multiple all at once: he is letter-as-naming-function, the structural strength of the triangular form, phallus, rocket, sword, mountain, and climax. His story is subsumed by the vividness of the affect in order to reorient interpretation from the actions of the war to the effects. Without this human present anymore, what *Fifty Days at Iliam* provides is the *deposit* of human violence, the pile of garbage left after the last person takes their last breath, as if to say: here is our final tragedy spelled out in blood.

If Twombly is the artist to elevate the word in painting to the status of a figure, where might there be an instance of the word, in its typical context of writing, being elevated passed its purely semiotic function, the word-made-object which is propelled from its history to speak about itself freely for the first time? The practices of Twombly in painting share a

striking resemblance with the late poetic methods of Louis Zukofsky: 1) the reworking of historical source material into new artistic expressions of a monstrous body of work which resists 1:1 reading between the new and "source" texts; 2) the "objectification" of the word; and 3) pushing the limits of the deterritorializing word to disrupt the possibility of comprehensive narrative.

Zukofsky offers a unique and experimental prosody of historical undoing, problematizing not only historiography, but demanding the reevaluation of our conceptions of words as vehicles for concrete understanding. This chapter will address movements "A"-22 and "A"-23 of Zukofsky's epic from the analytical standpoint of historical representation, looking at the ways in which Zukofsky's poetic methods radically reconceive the necessity of linear narrative in history. These two structurally mirrored movements function as bookends on either side of the birth of human language. "A"-22 represents the period of geological and biological development of the planet prior to the beginning of civilization; "A"-23 represents the developments of language and culture since roughly the time of the Sumerians. Furthermore, this chapter will establish a reading of Zukofsky's poetics that opens up the interpretation of issues in linear narrative, concrete understanding of language, and the proposition of new methods of (re)writing the past. Additionally, by incorporating Gilles Deleuze's linguistic-literary concept of "stuttering" and Walter Benjamin's concept of historical continuum into my reading, I hope to make the case that Zukofsky is simultaneously exploring the limits of literary utterance *and* historical narrative in the formation of his late poetics.

Zukofsky wrote movements "A"-22 and "A"-23, the final movements of *"A"* to be written composed by the author himself, between 1970 and 1974. He began "A"-22 on

Valentine's Day of 1970, completing it on April 14, 1973, and wrote "A"-23 between April 13th, 1973 and September 21, 1974. In terms of composition, these two movements mark the end of Zukofsky's "poem of a life," a label he used to describe both the duration of the project and the involvement of his own personal life in the poem itself.

In keeping with this, Zukofsky takes on all life as his subject, and "move(s) outward over the whole recorded range of human culture – and beyond that, to the geological and natural histories within which that culture had grown and developed" (Scroggins 444). This mass of natural and cultural development is not represented as a linear, narrativized history. Instead, we may read it as a deposit of the artifacts of history as they are piled up in a senseless heap of overlapping, simultaneous phenomena, thereby rupturing the imposed narratives of causal history, forcing the practice of historiography to stutter and reveal its own limitations.

Zukofsky himself saw these two movements as a pair of histories (Scroggins 443). "A"-22 functions as a surveying of the changing physical landscape of earth, and through the poetic description of such development "[h]uman language, and thereby human thought, take form within the context of these vast geological processes" (443). Movement 22 lays the groundwork for human development by setting the stage with a description of the physical, material conditions of the earth, the well from which the later achievements of culture will spring. Zukofsky spans the time from the formation of land masses all the way to the present writing of the poem. The movement ends with Zukofsky vacationing in Bermuda and reading *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, who was one of the authors most influential to Zukofsky's own writing. These two bookends – volcanic formation and literature – frame the movement as

the span of history which shaped and formed the author as a general concept, but more importantly the author of *"A"* himself.

The two movements work in tandem to give the record of two periods on either side of the birth of literature. "A"-23 works as a turn to the human as a subject, or rather human production, taking as its focus the development of human language through its literature. This movement may be summed up as the "the entire history of human word making," in a more foregrounded sense than "A"-22, which frames speech, philosophy, and wisdom within the "prior and more fundamental context" of nature (Scroggins 446).

"A"-22/23 represent what Scroggins terms the height of Zukofsky's late poetics. The movements of *"A"* written prior to these two had displayed a wide variety of forms. "A"-1 is an example of traditional free verse, without any governing structure or pattern. "A"-7 was composed as a series of sonnets. "A"-21 and "A"-24 are a 70-page drama and a 250-page masque, respectively. But the paralleled forms of "A"-22 and "A"-23 represent something quite distinct from the heterogeneity of the rest of the poem in their relative formal simplicity. They function as two monolithic columns through which the reader exits the poem. As an illustration of this congruity, I quote them alongside one another,

"A"-22	"A"-23
How to write history, policy	Hush seeking oath now go
an unteachable gift of nature:	brightness pass you, high hill
farmer prophesies better than poet	lifted hand water anointed rush—
two diapasons cleared mutes wrong	*the labour of the olive*
nameless, "not mine" comes from	horses walk thru, the sun
the sage calling fig *fig* (527)	moon stood, singer stringed instrument. (547)

The long, unbroken middle sections of each movement assert a concentrated language that affects itself in other movements as sprawling and diverse. Simultaneously, these movements cover more ground, so to speak, than any of the other movements combined. This dynamic,

between the breadth of content and the condensed language, culminates in a poetics wholly

unlike any other section of *"A"*. This condensation of language, or truncated syntax, is the

prosodic vehicle by which Zukofsky's interpretation and philosophy of history will show

itself.

Its form consists of five-word lines[3] totaling 1,000 lines. This body of lines is not

divided into regular stanzas but instead consists of 1) a kind of overture (for both 22 and 23),

2) a main body, and 3) a conclusion. Following the inscription, the form of "A"-22 is far

more regular throughout than any other movements of *"A"*. The "overture" occupies 103

lines, within 20 five-line stanzas following the inscription, followed by an 800-line body, and

then a conclusion of 19 stanzas of five-lines each, with a concluding couplet. I quote them

here at length in order to give an impression of visual character of the movement,

> no piper lead with nonsense
> before its music don't, horse,
> brag of faith too much –
> fear thawed reach three-fingered chord
> sweet treble hold lovely – initial
>
> Late later and much later
> surge sea erupts boiling molten
> lava island from ice, land
> seen into color thru day
> and night: voiced, once unheard
> earth beginning idola of years
> that love well forget late
> History's best left emptied of names'
> impertinence met on the ways:
> shows then the little earth
> at regard of the heavens
> unfolding tract and flying congregate
> birds their hiding valentine's day: (511)

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[3] There is at least one exception, the line "are no ties cities feed ruins" (*"A"* 516)

Such a form gives the impression of condensation, elongation, and density. The quantity of relatively short lines, without line breaks, convey a feeling of interminability, that the poem simply keeps going and going. The proximity of length between lines makes it resolutely uniform and thus draws an awareness to its visual and formal consistency. While the five-word line scheme implies a visual regularity, it is precisely from this strict rule that Zukofsky gives metric variety and complexity to the movement. In some cases, he hyphenates two or more words to count as one. A few examples of this move are the lines "fear thawed reach three-fingered chord" (511), "men in alembic, consonants with-without" (528), and "entombed coppers – merry-go-round, riding ridden" (538). The alembic invoked here echoes the process of distillation in Zukofsky's writing: the transformation of narrative to an affect. It is, as Deleuze determined, the horror of history being displayed, not the scream. This gives the sense of adding more content than the volume of the container allows, giving way to writing with a sense of pressure that grows from the inside.

Additionally, by structuring the lines by word count, Zukofsky is able to play with the syllabic count of the lines in order to create a wide variety of spatial form and temporal duration. This manner of varying form and duration within a constrained system of further adds to this sense of internal pressure. The pressure also stems from the disjunction of the conjoined images, between which any narrative derives. But Zukofsky leaves no room between the images, and so any sense of narrative begins to vanish, leaving only the knot of paratactic clauses and harshly juxtaposed images. An example of the discrepancy between some lines which occur on the same page is the movement from "human cranium's dendritical crystallizations offer" (16) to "skills as of bees in" (the shortest possible 5). This difference in syllabic value is illustrative of swaying, variable sense of length where the five-

word line serves as a vague boundary to a heterogenous prosody that dances within, a relationship reminiscent of the lines "the law, water shaped / to the container it's in" (523). The thought of the poem is, like the water, not altered in its fundamental properties by the form, but regulated by it, and only ever externally. But this water may expand, contract, or evaporate, and its containment is defined only in part by the material conditions of its exterior, for its own physical makeup is also a potentially problematizing force for its receptacle. The climate, external even to the receptacle, may cause the water to freeze and the glass to shatter.

"A"-22 begins with the inscription, "AN ERA / ANY TIME / OF YEAR" (508). This sets off the movement as one which is opening up to concepts outside of the poet, either of this poem or any poet tied to a specific historical moment. By using the indefinite articles of "an" and "any", this poem stages itself as outside of any single concrete moment. Leading with the indefinite disrupts the notion that the events occurring in the poem are contingent on the linear history which preceded them; it is not a deterministic conception of time. This allows for the work to remain hospitable to a multiplicity of interpretations, that the things read here may happen at any point, either now, before, or perhaps again.

In *Disjunctive Poetics*, Peter Quartermain identifies this inscription as "three thoroughly Joycean lines which act out a Viconian reading of history through etymology whilst preserving and insisting on the word as object" (105). The inscription implies a timelessness of the subsequent lines, and its intrinsic (and perhaps veiled) complexity offers a precedent for the kind of reading that should follow. The inscription consists of a symmetrical nine vowels and nine consonants. Each line is composed of an article on the left side and a time-noun on the right side. This emphasis on synchronicity and numerology

(9+9=18) is indicative the personal obsession Zukofsky held with numbers (Quartermain 107). This immediate tension in balance between weak, inconsequential words ("an," "any," "of") and loaded words relating to *chronos* (era, time, year) when considered alongside the equal ratio of vowel to consonant reveals a simultaneous occurrence of balance/imbalance, indicating that from an equilibrium of material (the letters) a disequilibrium (in words) arises.

Quartermain additionally addresses the role of wordplay and etymology in the inscription, linking it to the notorious use of both in the work of Joyce (106). If one wishes to dive into the history of even one of these words they would inevitably spend quite some time and effort before ever reaching the body of the poem itself. For instance, if the reader acknowledges the aural aspect of the poem, the word "era" may produce the effect of "air a" or "error." Its Latin origin of *aera* (recorded numbers or calculations) is invoked as well. This speaks to the fascination with quantification in the numerical symmetry of the inscription and its inversion of chronological sequence.

The example here of recorded time (*aera*) being inscribed etymologically into abstract time (era) is a concise illustration of the palimpsestic methods of Zukofsky and his desire to enact an entire history in a single word (Quartermain 111). Zukofsky's writing offers a creative engagement with the constraints of history writing by both showing these constraints in poetic lines based on necessary concision *and* simultaneously radically reconceptualizing the relationship between the time covered in history writing and the historical perspective of the author. In this case, then, time is only the written account of itself; it is only the self-reflexive signifier and never the signified. He is able to problematize and bring to light the notion that this abstract time somehow only springs from having already been written. It is, in other words, an internal contradiction, because the recorded

time becomes "time" only upon its recording. Therefore, there is not an absolute, or ideal, state of that time, and historical time is a construction grounded in the writing of history.

This opportunity for creative, combinatorial reading, condensed into six words, is like a microcosm of *"A"* as a whole as it serves as an illustration for the difficulties inherent to any reading of the poem. The many paths which Zukofsky's writing opens up to lead you out and around before making it very far down the page. In his monograph on *"A"*, Barry Ahearn writes that despite the poem's difficulty, readers may "follow the music" of it as one way of getting a sense of *"A"* and its workings. While the allure of this method is tempting, he writes, one may still "sift content from the rubble," with the caveat that "Prospectors should be warned, however, that intellectual fatigue soon sets in" (Ahearn 181). The possibilities that the inscription to "A"-22 is capable of producing in a close reading show that it is crucial to not only follow the music, but to sift through the rubble as well.

Through the ambiguity of the inscription, Zukofsky puts forth a model of recurring time. As early as "A"-2, Zukofsky makes the first of many references to "liveforever," a common name for a genus of perennial plants, *Sempervivium* (7). At the beginning of "A"-22 this invocation of the plant is echoed in the longing to "let me live here ever, / sweet now" (508). Although these two movements were written decades apart, the recursion of the image in "A"-22 creates a sense of simultaneity between them. This sensation is even more striking when we consider that "let me live here ever" is a reference to *The Tempest*. By reaching to connect even further in the past with the work of another author, Zukofsky showcases the poem's desire and capacity to accommodate and absorb history and writing outside of itself. This desire to live presently in light of the proposition put forth by the opening three lines

that this exploration is occurring in a nonspecific time seems to imply a desire to live amongst the things of history *at once*.

If "sweet now" is always ("ever"), then we need not differentiate between historical moments as points on a ray extending outward. Instead, we may understand them as affects experienced only as such in a singular present moment, a moment of permanent infinitude, and thus distinct from a marching, non-repeating time. It is as if Zukofsky is advocating for a conception of time monistically instead of taking any one cross-section of historical time as a source of inquiry. Therefore, the opening issue of the subject's relationship to progress in "A"-22 is the first problem to address in determining further any aspect of Zukofsky's image of history, in order to comprehend Zukofsky's model of history as *now*.

Zukofsky's Now

The characteristics of "A"-22 discussed thus far – its form, inscription, and characterization of time – render its contents and images into a deposit, or heap, of historical materials and events that occur all at once, and all the time. In the overture to "A"-22, Zukofsky writes of a "hectic of an instant" (509), and I would argue that this is perhaps the most apt self-description that occurs in the poem. This line conveys the chaos which occurs in each moment as these histories are reenacted and made new. These reenactments take many forms: speech, memory, reading, writing (with *"A"* as an example), monuments, as well as the repetitions of any of these acts. In a textual-material sense, we may understand *"A"*, despite its great length, as this kind of hectic instant, where history crashes together in the *now*.

Zukofsky gives his own image of the perceiving subject perched from the present

vantage point to look back down and arrest a frame of that history, therein,

> thinking of *a thought*
> not his thought, older complexities:
> the fractional state of the
> annals (512)

In this passage, Zukofsky opens with the indefinite quality of "*a thought*," emphasized

through italics. He acknowledges that the thought comes from elsewhere while

simultaneously implying that the thought's presence in the present is precisely derived from

the thinking-borrower of that thought: it is not his thought but occurs now only because of

him. The thought, of "older complexities," is something dredged back up because it remains

unresolved. The state of history is "fractional," which seems to imply that, although not

whole, that a denominator *is* known. The result of such a predicament is a cross-historical

intellectual link, for which there is "no key to the tangle" (*"A"* 518).

It is in Zukofsky's enacting of this principle that we may see how the annihilation of

the concept of progress may look. Zukofsky's "hectic of an instant" is the disruption of

causality in history. Each moment is its own system of flux, so that between these moments

there is also only a hectic relationship, and any progressive sense of history is undermined in

favor of a chaotic one. As in the "Star-Gate" sequence of Kubrick's *2001: A Space* Odyssey,

Zukofsky's language produces the effect of a barrage of images flashing rapidly across a

screen, the poet's eye as a lens. One instance of this in "A"-22 is a catalogue of botanical,

geological, and zoological phenomena, and follows the preface of "if created Once (a

thought) / or thought of consecutively…" (513). The list reads,

> … fossiliferous
> marl saved froghopper, ladybird, glowworm,
> red admiral, mingling in dredged

> lake mud, anachronous stone, horn,
> bone, jade, an armlet's brass
> wire, flax plaited, not woven,
> carbonized apple, raspberry, blackberry seed,
> wild plum drupe, reindeer antler
> nowhere, remains of a larger
> hunting dog, a forest pony,
> a burnt brick, and round
> small bodies…
> … might have been
> strung together as beads, the
> bond that united them unbroken. (513)

It is in the spirit of this discussion of the conception of history that Walter Benjamin becomes

so relevant, and his 1940 essay, "On the Concept of History," incomplete at the time of his

death, proves to be a catalyzing supplement. This is especially true when considered through

Zukofsky's writing of a history poem wherein things are considered and presented "at once,"

impossibly entangled, and without rigid narrative. Benjamin's project to reconceptualize

historical time is useful for reading how Zukofsky's abstractions are taking up similar

concerns but in the poetic realm.

The issue of history, for both Benjamin and Zukofsky, is never a purely academic

affair, and there are stakes to its inherent problems that become particularly evident in key

historical moments. Both writers lived during the Second World War, and Benjamin, fearing

capture at the approaching Vichy/Spanish front, tragically died before its end. Zukofsky,

witnessing these horrors of the war from the other side of the Atlantic, gave a good deal of

space to the war in the earlier books of *"A"*, as in "A"-10's depiction of the fall of Paris:

"Mass, massed refugees on the roads / Go to mass with the air / and the shrapnel for a

church" (112). The timeliness of Benjamin's writing on history speaks precisely to the role

that history plays in contemporary political events, emphasizing that history is not a harmless

thing that has been transcended and that, in fact, it is actually a powerful tool that has yet to

be seized and utilized by anyone other than the dominant class. Zukofsky takes this concern

to poetry, where the epic poem is refashioned to occupy itself with historical realities, rather

than propagandistic national origin stories.

Benjamin first takes as his task the distinguishing between the methods and

ideologies of historicists and historical materialists, advocating with hope of productive

potential for those of the latter. His overarching concern is with the view of the past as a

continuum, and he cites Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* as an illustration of the historical

perspective necessary to make political use of history in the present, to look back at history

not as a "chain of events" but as "one single catastrophe" (Benjamin 392). Zukofsky

accordingly treats the history of "A"-22 not as the string of causalities but rather as a singular

plane; an incomprehensible mess to sift through; the "rubble on top of rubble" that piles at

the feet of the angel.

Zukofsky's tangle may be thought of as that "single catastrophe" that Benjamin

identifies with Klee's angel of history. Zukofsky's figure stands at the limit of the past,

looking back at the "wreckage," as Benjamin labels it, of the "fractional state". And like the

angel, this figure "would like to stay, awaken up the dead, and make whole what has been

smashed" (Benjamin 392). Perhaps he lacks a key to the tangle of these older thoughts as

they relate to the present, seeking to redeem these thoughts only as they may be redeemed

across history.

But this recorded thought of history is one that propels the figure forward through

time without the opportunity to make sense of that entanglement. The force that prevents him

from staying in place to redeem that past is what Benjamin identifies as the notion of

progress (392). The cause-and-effect view of history as a linear progression of events which

occur resolutely makes this redemption an impossible task. While Zukofsky's figure is

depicted in terms of desiring to make himself and his thought one with those of the past,

there is the sense that the gulf cannot be bridged. These "older complexities" are thoughts

that belong to the books, and so long as these books are viewed solely as a part of the past,

without an urgent relevance to the now, the problem will remain. To allow thought to be

defined by the parameters of a dislocated, historical idea is to give oneself up to perpetual

dislocation between oneself and that history.

Instead, Zukofsky is able to conceive of a language which attempts to enact, from a

new angle, a radically revised vision of history as it pertains to the present historical moment.

He writes,

> …Truth's way all one
> Where it begins and shall
> Come back again thru traceless
> *Now* (517)

Here Zukofsky conceives of truth, and by extension history, as a unity. In this philosophy,

the beginning and return of things are one, passing through the "traceless / *Now*." They

remain inseparable by virtue of being thought at-once, and always in the present. This notion

is illustrated later in "A"-22 through Zukofsky's "peasant gardener" whose plants he "prefers

to greet by ancient names" (535). The gardener and these ancient names are collapsed in

time, which is in contrast to the gardener who employs modern botanical terminology,

mistaking the newer terms as evidence of progress in understanding.

Charles Bernstein links Zukofsky's late poetics to Benjamin's now-time in a 1992

talk entitled, "Before Time: For David Antin." He identifies "how plot and story can really

steal this now-time." This theft derives itself from the narrativization of experience, a process

which necessitates plotting events along a chronological line. Storytelling is inherently

dangerous to the redemption of now-time because of this fundamental adherence to plot.[4]

Bernstein echoes the early description of perception in relation to the formation of earth's

landmass in "A"-22, where land is "seen into color." He recalls an ancient time when "poets'

words called that sentient world into being." Bernstein emphasizes the role that language and

perception have always played in relation to the world as a perceived field, to the extent that

this field is an actual result of that new capacity to perceive.

This unintelligible, rigidly irrelevant thought viewed separate from the present serves

as the model for Benjamin's conception of the difference between the historical materialist

and the historicist, for as he posits,

> The historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a
> transition, but in which time takes a stand [*einsteht*] and has come to a standstill. For
> this notion defines the very present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism
> offers the 'eternal' image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique
> experience with the past (396)

For Zukofsky, a similar fallacy occurs when "Scribes conceive history as tho / sky, sun, men

never were" (522). The danger in this kind of history is the total removal of the historical

subject(s) from the reality of the present, where the subject is narrativized and abstracted

almost to the extent of becoming a fiction. This conception of the relationship between

history and writing may be further understood as a link between form and information. "Sky,

sun, men" are not treated as they were, but are instead reduced to a kind of disembodied data.

Referring back to the inscription of the movement, the etymological relationship between

"era" and "aera" (recorded numbers and calculations) takes on new stakes as it becomes clear

that this conception of time necessarily involves the reduction of life into information.

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[4] Even instances of "non-linear" storytelling fall into this trap. The disruptions of chronology in a text, such as in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, are only effective because of their resistance to linear time. If anything, by telling a story in a such a manner, the concept of chronology is reinforced. It is not the order of things, but the narrative that pervades them.

This conception of history is framed as a static re-recapitulation. It does not grant them life, only permanence of death, always already lost to history (though we know they are not). These "men never were" insofar as that which is made rigid by historical abstraction is robbed of ever having lived. By virtue of severing these subjects from the organic field of matter which had given them life, the historicist disconnects between the image of life and life itself. This is true even the great figures of history, as Zukofsky writes that "Callous stone men great names / are too late if ties / are no ties" (516). The "great names" are monumentalized and decontextualized through abstraction from the vital forces which defined them as a part of reality.

This past that Benjamin calls for us to reclaim is one that may "be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again" (390). This moment of recognizability emphasizes the "moment of danger" and redirects the relevance of history from a cold retelling of the past towards the kairotic, present moment, wherein one may wrestle up a buried part of that history to liberate it, however briefly. This notion is furthered by Zukofsky, who asserts that we eschew these "older complexities" of others' thoughts, "For *now* it is: not / is the same and can / be thought and thought is / *now*" (517). Zukofsky's now-thought thus resonates with Benjamin's concept of "now-time" (*Jetzeit*). Of now-time, Benjamin posits that history is not comprised of "homogenous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time" which is attained through "tremendous abbreviation," and produces the model of messianic time (396). Zukofsky dredges up these "older complexities," through the collapsing of ideas, figures, and events, so that "thought is / *now*," and so contracts time across massive periods. This abbreviation is Benjamin's weak messianism, the reclamation of history's *Jetzeit*.

This understanding of history is capable of mending that vital connection between the past and the present, that "hectic of an instant." Here, the former is not an inactive subject but one that offers a way out through its potential to shock contemporary consciousness out of its linearity via this messianic time. Zukofsky illustrates a hope for a mending of past and present,

> child learns on blank paper,
> an old man rewrites palimpsest,
> a good heart dejected brings
> others peace, asks no returns,
> assumes milestones guide all and
> belong to each so no
> one people can claim to
> excel. (525)

For Zukofsky, the disparate relations of the spatio-temporal duration of various subjects is nonconsequential to their ability to harmonize, which requires a perspective that eliminates hierarchies relating to agency and value. An alternative perspective is conceptualized in the lines "not small for the greatest / not great for the smallest / merely a tree's highest branches" (520). The notion of understanding things not through ordering-by-comparison, but by treating things as they *were* and *always are* hearkens to Zukofsky's concepts of perfectly capturing historical particulars as previously discussed in relation to "A"-6. The old man, representative of the contemporary individual, is able to compose through layering and simultaneity. In Benjamin's terms, he fulfills the promise made with the past by resolving the distance from it, sharing the "milestones" which "guide all" and denunciating any claim that "one people," either historical or contemporary, rises above the rest.

This echoes Benjamin's sentiment that people are never lost to history; they are only suppressed through its machinations at the hands of dominant powers. In hist poetry, Zukofsky posits a relationship between different temporalities as an opportunity to create

new connections and produce new affects. In fact, the opening of the first movement of *"A"* alludes to this very phenomenon of time-leaping affiliation when the poet attends a performance of Bach,

> The Passion According to Matthew,
> Composed seventeen twenty-nine,
> Rendered at Carnegie Hall,
> Nineteen twenty-eight,
> Thursday evening, the fifth of April.
> The autos parked, honking. (1)

Following this description of almost two centuries colliding together, the poet-figure emerges from the collision as if from a revelation: "I lit a cigarette, and stepped free / Beyond the red light of the exit" (2). While the concert has ended, he leaves "*free*" with a newfound awareness of his proximity to the past, goes home, and begins writing the poem we are reading. It is a connection born purely from subjective association, as if the line drawn is significant by virtue of its mere happening. Through the temporal juxtaposition of these two dates – 1729 and 1928 – and the metapoetic move of depicting the significance of the inspiration to begin the poem *within* the text itself, Zukofsky creates a new framework of historical poetics which foregrounds the contemporary experience of the historical. Through this poetics he is capable of collapsing time in order to bring about new readings from the collision. Anachronism is not a concern here, for it is far more important that we find here the potential for these collisions to reconcile the present with the past in order to restore the now-time.

Returning to an invocation of the inscription to "A"-22, Zukofsky writes, "now summer happy new year / any time of year – so" (*"A"* 511). Summer and new year are opposed but set as occurring whenever so that the cyclical time of the seasons and calendar begins to merge with the simultaneity of "any time of year". We wait a little while, and

they're back. But last summer, last year are not gone – no – they simply rest beneath, tinting

that which is occurring in the moment: "I wonder if this one'll be as hot as the last." The

"older complexities" creep back up, over and over, each time becoming older and more

complex. It is an unfolding that gains in richness as it weaves further these new materials,

reaching to connect and continue becoming-with each new and newer (and always old)

intensity which shoots out from that whirling time. For instance, here I stand writing of the

older complexities yet again.

The ending conjunction of "any time of year – so", rests on the other side of the dash.

The non-conjoining conjunction indicates a point of departure at the realization, or rather,

from the realization of time as a kind of launch pad or a dock which delineates the boundary

or limit between the catalogued and the chaotic, the striated and the smooth spaces[5]. The

movement from one category to the other, as in the cases of Twombly or Bacon, is

reminiscent of the disruption of order to which Benjamin attributes the possibility of

reformulating how history is made to work.

Applied in terms of poetics, this disruption requires the birth of new formal strategies

which are able "to make the continuum of history explode" (Benjamin 395). In the case of

"A", the strategies for such a disruption are multivalent. In the same way that the Language

Poets later sought to prioritize the mechanics of language, Zukofsky takes vocabulary,

grammar, syntax, form, sound, etc. and deploys them as a means to show the seams of

language. These moments of homophonic play, shifting syntax, and ambiguous subject/verb

relations push the language to the point of an eruption. The failure of language to

accommodate this poetics is an indication of an upper limit of its capacity to convey meaning

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[5] See Deleuze and Guattari, from "On Several Regimes of Signs," in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, trans. Brian Massumi)

through traditional means. But at the same time, it is precisely the moment where a new,

revolutionary kind of communication begins to show itself.

This is not an oppositional kind of reaction; for to be such would be to adhere to the

forces which shape thought and becoming by defining itself in the negative. Instead,

Zukofsky pushes the constraints of language to show the extent to which it can

accommodate, rather than exclude, radical forms of expression. What is necessary in order to

resist the codification and institutionalization of expressive forms is to maintain

experimentation, to move chaotically with respect to that dominant force, to sneak around

behind it and give it a scare. In this sense, it is not of importance to re-narrativize histories of

progress with preference given to subordinated classes, but to rattle the whole machine and

show its malfunctions before it is adapted and repaired to accommodate the disruption. The

history narrative grounded on any idea of progress "recognizes only the progress in

mastering nature, not the retrogression of society; it already displays the technocratic features

that later emerge in fascism" (Benjamin 393).

The scope of Zukofsky's survey, eons of time, speaks to a desire to rescue and

revitalize the entirety of humanity from the rubble behind him, if only briefly. The result is

not the exploration of human development, but the totalizing *conditions* of that development,

as one massive machine encompassing both nature and culture as inseparable concepts. If

"history's best left emptied of / names' impertinence" then there is no use in giving the

history of what Benjamin terms the "victors." The celebration of individual heroes,

undoubtedly a key trait of the traditional epic tale, is abandoned, towards the total

"dissolution of the subject," a concept Daniel Smith discusses in his introduction to

Deleuze's *Essays Clinical and Critical* (xxiv). In its stead, Zukofsky conceives of a

restructured history which seeks to embrace the unity of things, large and small, as intricately

interconnected and without hierarchy. In this sense he ties issues of history writing with the

role that history has historically played in the epic poem by spending a great deal of time on

the *pre*historic. Quoting it again at length for the ease of reference, the main body of "A"-22

begins,

> Late later and much later
> surge sea erupts boiling molten
> lava island from ice, land
> seen into color thru day
> and night: voiced, once unheard
> earth beginning idola of years
> that love well forget late
> History's best left emptied of names'
> impertinence met on the ways (511)

The emphasis of this scene occurring "later", of time having passed, positions whatever

comes after it, yet unknown, as only ever being contingent on the past which gave shape to it.

Zukofsky illustrates the emergence of "lava island *from* ice" (my emphasis) so that a direct

connection between two divergent images is presented as a logical outcome. The formation

of these natural processes, in their chaos, allows for an almost infinite number of possible

outcomes of landscape and biological evolution. So while it is a statistically miracle, it is also

inevitable that from this chaos arises, without any claim to elevated status, the human

subject.

This subject is introduced not by its figuration or embodiment but through its capacity

to perceive, as land is "seen into color." In this case the perception of land is the catalyst for

the conception of its color, and the beginning of color as a quality of human perception. This

emergent, seeing subjectivity, still unheard, gives shape as well to the articulation of the

experience of time passing. Zukofsky writes in "A"-12 that "In Hebrew 'In the Beginning' /

Means literally from the head?" (142). The interrogative tone of these lines intimates a confusion at the idea that there was nothing there before there was a human mind to perceive it. As the inscription at the beginning of the movement suggests, time itself is only the product of its recording. This is at odds with the pre-human landscape wherein time is characterized by its smoothness, not its division but its movement of "Late later and much later." But when this voice "once unheard" emerges, it engenders somehow that first idola, that first thought (or fallacy?), setting forth the first product of thought in the decree that history was better off without the naming-function which gives a veil of essence by virtue of positioning itself at the beginning of things. Although writing of a different medium, Deleuze's determination that the modern painter is only born when they cease to experience themselves as an essence and begin to do so as an accident is equally applicable to the poem that erases signs of self-creation in favor of pure acts of creation which are precipitated instead from the becoming of that accident and not an immanent determination (*Bacon* 101).

Having drawn a line around Benjamin and Zukofsky, and circling their kindred thinking on a productive perspective on the past, we may move from reading history for what limitations it places on itself, and societies tethered to it, and turn toward the literary methods that disrupt that tradition. Zukofsky's project takes the byproducts of that history and makes them new as a means to triangulate an upper limit to its potentiality of use-value; to fulfill that pact Benjamin claims we've made with the past, to explode that which runs the risk of disappearing out of the daisy chain of historicism. The task remains incomplete, or is at least stalled, if we resign to the diagnosis of inadequacies in historiography, only to wallow in its impossibilities. It is thus necessary to conceive of concepts or frameworks in language and writing which may disrupt the linear flow of history and, in order to do so, I find it useful to

introduce another theoretical element to the problem at hand through some of the writing of

Gilles Deleuze concerning language and regimes of signs.

"A"-23 – A Stuttering History

The remainder of this chapter will shift to a focus on Zukofsky's "A"-23 and the

ways in which the concepts of history addressed above are carried out in the poetic language

used to include history, as followed through the history of literature. The movement from

"A"-22 "A"-23 here is useful as the latter represents a history of language and literature,

whereas the former detailed the time leading up to it. Zukofsky's interpretation of the

trajectory of western literature is as iconoclastic as his treatment of the formation of modern

geology and the birth of human perception. As "A"-22 framed history as these natural

developments giving way to the advent of literature, with the poet reading Shakespeare, "A"-

23 follows the line from oral poetry to the construction of *"A"* itself.

The primary theory incorporated for this is the work of Gilles Deleuze in *Essays*

Critical and Clinical, as well as his collaborations with Félix Guattari in "On Several

Regimes of Signs," from *A Thousand Plateaus*, and *What is Philosophy?* By putting

Zukofsky's poetics into conversation with the theories of language and signs of Deleuze and

Guattari, it is possible to develop further a conception of poetry's capacity to disrupt systems

of language and, in application, practices of history writing. To do so will necessitate a look

at the formal and technical aspects of the poems not as they illuminate historical

representation but as they problematize the language. In turn, a focus will rest on syntax,

form, enjambment, pronoun-use, and homophony. If "A"-22 articulated a goal of unifying

history in its difference, "A"-23 hypothesizes a use of language that approaches that goal.

While in the trajectory of "A"-22 Zukofsky devotes most of his space to the natural processes of the earth, it is, from the beginning, only ever understood through human perception. So although the "order" of history is framed as the movement from the natural to the human, the language used to illustrate the scene is always constructing the natural as an exterior force.

In "The Landscape of Sensation," Ronald Bogue addresses the Deleuzian concepts of the house and the cosmos. In this formulation, the house represents "scaffolding that delimits and frames forces," where the cosmos "is ultimately unframed and without limits, a plane that extends into infinity" (18). The house is the regulating force of the cosmos, through which the intersecting parts of the cosmos-plane pass. Most of the essay concerns the discussions of landscape representation in painting, but in the conclusion, Bogue turns to literature, writing that, "creates 'nonhuman landscapes of nature,' hallucinatory images at the limits of language, visions interconnected with sonic auditions… perhaps no art is more devoted to overcoming itself than literature" (Bogue 25). Sensation, the ultimate, lasting aspect of the arts "is not the flesh but the compound of nonhuman forces of the cosmos, of man's nonhuman becomings, and of the ambiguous house that exchanges and adjusts them, makes them whirl around like winds" (*What is Philosophy?* 183). We might understand history as the cosmos and literature as the house through which the former passes and is transformed. Literature is the means by which the massive glut of history is filtered through language and circulated; it is how we write about the way things have been, whether fictive or not. Now I turn to literature, that other history, in order to survey how these structuring forces contribute to the construction of that newer conception of history.

"A"-23 loosely takes the form of a history of western literature. It "begins" with the invocation of an Arapaho song, moving through the Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer, and then

addresses a slew of canonical European and American writers like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Byron, and Henry James. However, towards the end of the movement, Zukofsky's own writing from earlier movements of *"A"* enters. This is not so much *the* history of literature, but *a* history of literature as curated by the poet. That it ends with so much of Zukofsky's writing leads to the idea that this trajectory is about the writing that influences and ultimately culminates in *"A"*. This is a source of references for understanding the poem and the intertextuality of its language and style. However, as Scroggins writes of Zukofsky's "late citation", these sources "were important to the poet, they have a decisive impact on the poem as it stands in its finished form, but they are not—cannot be—the master key to poem's interpretation (423). Like "A"-22, this movement is constructed on a principle of cyclicality and simultaneity, but whereas the former sought to justify this principle in actual time, "A"-23 eliminates the aspect of sequential time altogether and treats the language as one big heap, and only ordered as it makes sense to the poet at hand.

From the start of this movement we can see that the whole of *"A"* begins to come full circle. The movement opens "An unforeseen delight a round / beginning ardent; to end blest / presence less than nothing thrives" (536), which calls back to the very opening of the poem: "A / Round of fiddles playing Bach" (1). This emphasis on the "round," the musical term for performing in staggered unison, characterizes the work as one which harmonizes with itself. Although textually the poem performs itself in one long sequence, these kinds of references to its own (intra)textuality show that the work is resonating with various pieces simultaneously. While one may not have considered the round since the opening of the poem, at this point, though the introduction is not on the page, it is called back up in the mind. The feeling of "at once" that pervades the whole of "A"-22 reaches its pitch as the double-ness

forms between himself and his younger self. "A"-23's first lines, in invoking the opening of

"A", recycles of parts of the poem in this movement in a manner as fugue-like as the Bach

piece which inspired its very composition.

In the last five-line stanza before the main body of the movement, Zukofsky makes

the explicit turn from the political history of "A"-18 and the natural history of "A"-22

towards something else. He writes,

> the saving history
> not to deny the gifts
> of time where those who
> never met together may hear
> this other time sound *one* (539)

Of these lines, Ahearn writes "Human history, natural history, and now this mysterious

'saving history.' What is it? … The saving history is poetry: 'saving' as in 'remembering'

and 'salvation.'" (Ahearn 193). Zukofsky sees poetry as a form of art with the capacity, not

only to unite history, but to dredge up past figures and *save* them. But to strive to call back

into memory those of the past so that they "may hear / this other time sound *one*" is indeed a

project of linguistic salvation. If language is the force by which reality is constructed, then it

is the language of history that must be revised as much as the perspective of historical

writing: the *how* of writing as much as the *what*.

This echoes with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the postsignifying regime,

derived from the chapter "On Several Regimes of Signs." Defined as "passional" not

"ideational," the postsignifying regime is action and emotion, not idea (*ATP* 120). This

distinction is characterized by Deleuze and Guatarri through the contrasting images of the

prophet and the priest, with the former representing the postsignifying. Using the story of

Jonah as an example, Deleuze and Guattari identify how Jonah, by *trying* to defy the will of

God and leaving for sea fulfills that will perfectly (122-3). Jonah, by defying God fulfills his

task. This notion correlates back to the prior discussion of Benjamin, where Zukofsky as

Jonah, tries to escape a traditional history but in doing so fulfills a redemptive pact with the

past, thereby restoring that weak messianic power of now-time. It calls up that group of

people – the ones still buried in history – and brings them into being for the very first time.

They reenter into a

> A world worn in whose
> Happiest reigns preempt their histories
>
> Which cannot help or hurt
> A foreseen curve where many
> Loci would dispose and *and's*
> Compound creature and creature together (536)

This is an illustration of Zukofsky's compounding treatment of history. It represents the

rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari through its' "and.. and.. and…" It disrupts the ordering and

hierarchical model of the tree, whereby historical subjects are arranged as stemming from

one source. For Zukofsky, the order is not so linear; here, *many* loci arrange the relationships

of these subjects, and the creatures are linked, not ordered.

Following the 100-line introduction, "A"-23 commences its literary history. Zukofsky

starts this middle section with the transliteration of an Arapaho song: "Ye nó we see hay / io

we hay we see / hay io we sée no" (539). The words, for the most part, are words that readers

in English would recognize – we, no, hay, see – yet the text eludes meaning for those who do

not understand the language. In the middle of this passage there is the parenthetical

"(windsong bis)" (539). "Bis" refers to the repetition of a musical phrase. Similar to the use

of "a round," the direction to repeat here signals something different. If this passage, which

represents the beginning of orality in poetry, is to repeat itself, then it means that the function

of orality is to resound even as that passage of text is left behind and the reader moves forward. The musical terminology is at odds with the literary form and creates a tension with the latter's modal limitations; the way text works is sequential, syntagmatic. But here, the text is telling itself, or the reader, to imagine the text repeating even as new text is encountered. This is an aesthetic "piling up" of historical accumulation, where the art of the past continues resonating with and into the present as new work is created, which is mimetic of the treatment of time in "A"-22. It imagines itself as a text, but with a capacity to incorporate non-literary. At the same time, this call-for-repetition insinuates a historical function akin to Benjamin's notion of progress.

Zukofsky structures his history not chronologically but poetically. The Arapaho song would clearly have been dated later than the Sumerian poem, but because the latter is a recorded text, it is positioned after the song, as another textual evolution toward the poem *"A"*. This emphasis on movement and beginnings is distinct from the traditional notion of progress in that it makes no qualitative claims. It's not that things get better, but that time just moves and accumulates more and more material, which in this case is nothing more than a source of inspiration. An illustration of this occurs at the outset of the movement, where Zukofsky writes,

> Nothing: unstopping motion whose smallest
> note further divided would serve
> nothing – destined actual infinitely initial,
> how dire this honor who'll
> peddle nothing: rederned this requiem
>
> alive (538)

This is a process of constant beginning, the "unstopping motion" of accumulation of "infinitely initial" creations. Furthermore, the emphasis here of nothing, undoes any notion of

inherent significance in reality. It is not about value necessarily but about the processes of multiplying, not dividing through time. Its value comes from its miraculousness of being, that if even one further division of its time were to occur then the whole thing would be undone. This echoes an early description of the network of materials of the universe, characterized as a "A heaven of stones whose / Swiftness made their separate orbits / One, that slackening would fall (518). It is the energy they share, propelling them, that unifies, not any significance that is shared.

By structuring the history this way, Zukofsky allows his own guiding principles to string histories together like beads, so that the orality of the Arapaho song then pervades into recorded literature. This orality is even how the retelling of the Epic of Gilgamesh is started. It begins, "Praise! gill . . gam . . mesh . ." (540). In this line, the name is broken down syllabically, so that each part resembles an English word. We have here the sensation of the original language being conjured through the English tongue. Returning to the dialectic of Bach/Zukofsky in "A"-1, this passage collapses even more time: the earliest existing recorded text coming through the mouth of the poet almost 4,000 years later, melded together as one.

Their temporal discrepancies are ignored in favor of their poetic coexistence, so that "Tongues commonly inaccurate talk viable / one to one, ear to / eye loving song greater than/ anything (537). The "ear to / Eye" signals a transition from orality to textuality. This is the beginning of material writing as an aspect of the poetic text. But this is not a qualitative shift. Instead, the concomitant eye *and* ear have now joined in the process of poetic interpretation, so that rather than considering them as two separate epochs, we may think of their conjunction as a more complex and rich opportunity of interpretation.

The retelling of the Epic of Gilgamesh closes the pre-European section of the history

by invoking the concept of the infinite within a musing on death. This epic, as a vestige of a

past civilization, still echoes through today as a beginning of storytelling. But Zukofsky,

hesitant of storytelling, removes its names (other than the first deconstruction of Gilgamesh's

name) and obscures its features to the point that it simply melds into his own narrative-less

text. It concludes,

> … "How
> can I, fatal. Eternal's forever,
> everlasting came after, and no
> part-fulness contracts forever. Or
> it's as you look: only
> the dragonfly's unformed wings wait
> the sun for its glory.
> I outlived a flood to
> be called everlasting, to know
> distant partings of tidal river,
> asleep and dead grow alike.
> Take home my gift, my
> secret, the plant you shall
> name, this journey as under
> water, '*Alive-Old-Stay-Young*.'" (543)

This final advice given to Gilgamesh speaks to the whole project of *"A"* in its celebration of

a kind of eternal life distinct from "immortality." This solution is textuality, as in

Shakespeare's Sonnet 15. "I outlived a flood to / be called everlasting" implies that it is not

literally everlasting, but *called* that, through the transmission of that story. I read this not as a

contradiction to the anti-narrative elements of *"A"* but as a testament to how literature and

texts keep echoing beyond their time and even their cultures. *"A"* is the proof of that

everlasting quality, even if the aim of this epic differs from the original.

The remainder of the movement is a barrage of literary references that would require

their own chapter to catalogue and explicate. They span from copious nods to Chaucer, the

Romantics, the Chapman translation of Homer, to Enlightenment-era philosophical and

scientific text, as well as references to the musical. What is significant here, however, is the

breadth of scope and speed at which Zukofsky moves through these historical figures and

their texts. Two or more authors may be referenced in a single line in an almost palimpsestic

fashion. At several moments, *"A"* seems to be even tripping over itself, as the already

condensed lines breakdown entirely into ellipses: "don't it know .. naturally . . Pride . . /

Daughter of Riches . . the Republick / of Dogs . . the Many . . usurps / sympathy" (561)

characterized further on by the line "Jubilant agony too too sped (562). This produces a

tension between the content of the poem and its own (in)ability to keep up with the pace of

that content. The employment of such a parataxis, the disjunctive syntax, foreground

language as it stutters. Although it may be grammatically incorrect, these paratactic methods

which race the poem through itself produces opportunities to reconsider the value of an

incorrect syntactic structure. It is emblematic of Deleuze's ideas concerning "the creation of

syntax," in the essay "Literature as Life," which "brings about not only a decomposition of

destruction of the maternal language, but also the invention of a new language within

language" (*Essays Clinical and Critical* 5). Zukofsky reinvents new ways of operating within

language in the same way that he restructures historical representation.

 Literature plays a role in *"A"* beyond just lineage of the vehicle for language. It

illustrates a method of reading, interpreting, and *incorporating* other concepts across time. It

is a poem that does not prescribe but absorbs. Therefore, the notion of the singular, Romantic

creative genius is erased in favor of the poet who lets himself dissolve in the history of

literature in order to produce something new, making no claims of pure authenticity or

solipsism. Poet-critic Barrett Watten writes that in *"A"*

the self is corrected, reflexive, to begin with. There is an immediate need to fit a 'noncanonized' individual into the dominant literary forms. Zukofsky's poetics are the poetics of an assimilation … the poem itself stands as a thing outside, a musical whole. (*Total Syntax* 33-34)

This assimilation is perhaps one of the strongest qualities of Zukofsky's writing, especially as it pertains to history. His poetry absorbs everything from his personal life, heritage, culture, as well as the literature he read and admired. It is a matter of integration that recalls the parameters of "A"-12 describing the desire to incorporate more than just poetry into the poetic, the integral of "upper limit music / lower limit speech (*"A"* 146).

The history of "A"-23 is one made out of love for the works which inspired his own writing. In the poem-essay, "Artifice of Absorption," Charles Bernstein proposes a quality of poetics in their capacity of absorption and impermeability. He writes that "the nature of absorption as a dynamic / of reading needs to be understood as a key element / in any ideologically conscious literary criticism" (21). However, while I agree with Bernstein in this capacity, I would extend his concept of reader to that of the writer, as one who is in the practice of reading as well. Zukofsky is perhaps a special example of this dual-role. The extent to which other literatures figure into his own writing make *"A"* as much an illustration of a life of engaged reading as it is writing. As fellow Language poet Jed Rasula writes in the collection edited by Andrews and Bernstein" "READING IS TRADITIONALLY THE MOST NEGLECTED OF ALL ARTS" (52). Zukofsky's use of literary reference works by obscuring and blurring the line between creation and reproduction. Scroggins notes that the "poet-horse does not create in the Romantic sense: he 'sows,' 'composes,' and above all 'hunts,' hoping to find the recurrences in culture out of which to 'compose' his own poem" (424). It is this diligence of reading that makes the poem one which breathes history in each word.

The reverence that Zukofsky shows to these literary predecessors has hereto been considered through his representation of their writing within his own reconstruction of literary history. Through it, we see the founding influences to Zukofsky's work, particularly in Shakespeare, who serves as the "beginning" of that history in "A"-22. But this representation of history is only one side of historical embodiment in *"A"*; Zukofsky should be considered simultaneously as reader *and* writer. The ways in which "A"-23 absorbs and integrates the writing of so many other authors, not only through acknowledgement but actual citation woven seamlessly with Zukofsky's own writing, points to Zukofsky as an active historical participant, not only the scribe of history. He is *engaging* with the history as much as he is setting it down to paper. It is a creative act of collaborating with the poets from long ago, where Zukofsky constructs new poems from old, borrowed words as a means of refashioning poetic history and exploding it into the poetic-now.

Chapter II

"To answer with the knowledge of history I have": "A"-21/24 and Historical Interaction

In March of 2018, while formulating my idea for this project I took a trip to New

York City with classmates of a seminar on 20th Century American Literature, and during a

break in our schedule, my roommate and I went to see the Guggenheim Museum on 5th

Avenue. I had gone in hopes of seeing a Picasso or Matisse (I've never lived in a place with

access to such famous works), but it was the central exhibit which ran along the spiral

walkway that really captured my attention. The work which struck me most was a large

assemblage, lying on the floor, half copper plating and half scaffolding. *We the People*

(2010-2012), a long-term sculptural project by Vietnamese-Danish conceptual artist Danh

Vō, which appeared as a part of the show *Take My Breath Away*, consists of a full-scale

recreation of the Statue of Liberty. However, the sculpture is disassembled, and various

pieces of the sculpture occupy galleries across the globe. It is an example of conceptual art

that makes no claims to a traditional form of artistic creation; it is a reproduction in the

technical sense but does not at all resemble the original in its totality, by virtue of its

fragmentation. The readings of the project could span from issues of American

exceptionalism, monoliths of cultural reductionism, or purely aesthetic concerns of

authorship/creativity, but what I found most engaging and eerie is that *We the People* is *at

once* the Statue of Liberty and *not* the Statue of Liberty.

Roberta Smith of *The New York Times* described Vō, not as an artist, but as a "hunter-

gatherer," and while this particular object was "created" in the traditional sense, its source

image certainly was gathered. It is a fragmented dispersal of the aura of the statue almost 150

years after its dedication, which begs the observer to reconsider the original and all its

promises on its own terms, as time passes. The piece called to mind Viktor Shklovsky's

concept of *ostranenie* (остранение), or "making strange," through its disrupting such a

monolithic American icon and giving it back in pieces, to make one ask, 'What is this? And

what have I thought it was, all this time?' Viewing Vō's piece, I could not help but to think

of the ways in which the sampling of historical artifacts in writing, as in ekphrastic practices,

functions in a similar way. Reading Louis Zukofsky at this time – with his employment of a

myriad of sampled texts – sparked a reconsideration of these artistic monoliths as they are

reframed centuries later in new contexts. As I have proposed in the previous chapter,

Zukofsky's work is preoccupied with reconceptualizing the ways in which older writing

functions when the contemporary poetic subject incorporates them into a new work.

This chapter will move away from the subject of historical representation, as

discussed in Chapter I, and turn to the concept of historical interaction or engagement, and to

do so I will look at movements 21 and 24 of *"A"* to survey the methods through which

Zukofsky *applies* the philosophy of history from 22/23 in his poetic practice, as performance,

rather than subject matter, through the engagement of the present individual with historical

material. This analysis will be grounded in themes of genre, translation, performance and

plagiarism/originality as they relate to a consideration of Zukofsky's model for a historically-

minded poetic consciousness. The theoretical conversation that underlies this discussion is

informed by Walter Benjamin, again, though in this chapter primarily his essay "The Task of

the Translator"; Gilles Deleuze on the concept of becoming in writing; and Charles

Bernstein, through his writings on Zukofsky, as well as his more general writing on poetics

in *Pitch of Poetry*. Ultimately, I hope to frame Zukofsky's project as one which exhibits a

kind of escape-work, which resists the isolation of an artwork by producing holes which offer lines of flight which reconnect the work to its external reality.

However, these movements require an augmented kind of reading. Whereas the readings in Chapter I were primarily a "traditional" kind of close reading, and although that will continue here, a more conceptual framework of reading is necessary to fully draw out the complexities and machinations of "A"-21/24. This kind of reading has been inspired by more recent poetic developments in the work of Kenneth Goldsmith, Tan Lin, and conceptual writing broadly.[6] To read these movements "conceptually" is to give emphasis to their macro-poetic characteristics, a reading of form, source material, context, etc. I take *"A"* as an opportunity to advance a practice of poetic reading. This is not poetry, strictly speaking, and yet as such it seems the most fitting place to address the concerns of a poem's capacity to express and incorporate outside material and manners of writing, as they manifest themselves through performances of drama ("A"-21) and music ("A"-24), still *within* a poem.

Zukofsky's Translations

Before addressing the role of translation in *"A"* it seems appropriate to consider the very important translation of Catullus that Celia and Louis Zukofsky had produced over the course of the 1960's and the contribution that this body of work has made on translation as a field. The collaboration was primarily divided between Celia's actual translating of the Latin into English and Louis' reworking of those translations in order to approximate the sound of the original. The brief preface to the collection of translations reads: "This translation of Catullus follows the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his Latin – tries, as is said, to breathe the

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[6] For more on conceptual writing, see Goldsmith's edited collection, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* (2011)

'literal' meaning with him." This method is categorized as "homophonic translation," or transliteration for some, wherein semantic meaning is a secondary concern to the preservation of the sonic qualities of the original language when translating into the target language.

Debate over precision in translation is an issue with important stakes, especially when considering the implications of representation and the colonial status of the source texts. Hasty translations geared toward audiences hungry for a taste of the exotic are all too common; we need look no further than the disputes around *A Thousand and One Nights*. But one aspect at the heart of this issue is an occupational debate over the tendentious relationship between the writer and the translator of the text as two productive entities. Narrowing in on this issue in poetry alone, I would like to briefly explore this relationship as a kind of preliminary work toward the larger poetic implications of translation based on sound. This section will explore the relationship between Walter Benjamin's essay on "The Task of the Translator" (1923) alongside Zukofsky's practice of homophonic translation, or translation based on preservation of the phonetic, and in doing so will hopefully give some sense of use-value (to use Deleuze's metric for literary value) to translations which, at face-value, upend the notion of "meaning" (Deleuze's alternative to use) in source texts in a kind of cruel game of distortion. Consulting Paul de Man's interpretation of Benjamin's text from a 1983 lecture and Charles Bernstein's essay "Breaking the Translation Curtain: The Homophonic Sublime", I will take as an example Bernstein's own reading of Louis and Celia Zukofsky's collaborative translation of Catullus as a case study for the potential enabled by certain acts of homophonic translation which uphold the concerns of Benjamin, before moving on to the implications and full apotheosis of these tendencies in "A"-21.

In his reading of Benjamin, Paul de Man takes as a point of departure what he identifies as an anti-modern thread in "The Task of the Translator." Tracing a line from Kant and Hegel through philosophy of the 20th century which indicated a movement away from an assumed subject, de Man argues that Benjamin's characterization of writing as ideal, sacred, and messianic, without reader in mind, goes against the progression of thought leading up to Benjamin's own time (de Man 17). This mystic quality to writing, its potential, de Man ascertains, leaves Benjamin in a place between "nihilistic rigor and sacred revelation," where in spite of the seriousness of his critique there maintains the optimism for a redemption of "pure language" (de Man18). And it is this simultaneous allowance for critical awareness and a belief that newness can be made that allows for us to apply his theories of translation to specific enacted modes of translating which strive to realize this pure language. This is a useful point of delineation for this essay, in that by isolating Benjamin's concern for writing as an optimistic endeavor we might take this hopefulness as our primary concern with respect to what may be gained through the process of translation. According to Benjamin, "all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole – an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language" (78). This idealistic, pure language is not something to be clarified or problematized here, but instead I wish to consider only one process through which this "totality" may be realized, being that of homophonic translation.

As another aspect to this issue, there is also the construction of difference between poet and translator, a distinction articulated by Benjamin: "as translation is a mode of its own, the task of the translator, too, may be regarded as distinct and clearly differentiated

from the task of the poet" that task which "consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*]

upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original"

(79). The task is indeed refracted, though perhaps not "distinct," for there is a case to be

made for the poetic qualities that arise and filter through the process of translation, especially

for a poet like Zukofsky. It seems naïve to deny that the influence translators possess over the

poem inevitably affects the production of "poetic" sensations that were absent in the original,

although, to Benjamin's credit, it is true this does not necessarily make the translator a poet.

But for Charles Bernstein, this hard line between the poet and translator is not so

impermeable. He argues in *Attack of the Difficult Poems* that,

> Disputes about translation are always a pretext for disputes about poetry. Translation theory is poetics by another name… attacks on translation for 'unfaithfulness' are typically pretexts for a rejection of a style of poetry in the translator's own language that the attacker finds unacceptable, unfaithful to his or her sense of the properties of that language. (201)

Bernstein's assertion, that within translation theory is always poetic theory, is useful in

considering the distinction between translation as a purely extra-literary act or as a poetic

collaboration. The latter, in explicit terms, perhaps relies on practices engendered by more

recent artistic techniques of intentional plagiarism, pastiche and remix. If we grant Bernstein

preference over Benjamin in the defined difference between poet and translator, we can

actually further grasp the translator's responsibility to make something new out of their own

language, navigating the issue of fidelity, "for what can be accurately paraphrased is not the

'poetic' content of the work" (Bernstein 199). Here is not the place to dispute notions of what

makes "poetic content," but it is useful to consider that poetry is not defined by its referential,

signified content. Instead, it must be viewed as a whole of parts incorporating these various

aspects: content, sound, form, etc.: a network of poetic affects in which translation only occupies one node.

What, then, is a model of translation that can accommodate the tenants laid down by Benjamin? Perhaps (part of) the answer lies in the practice of homophonic translation. On more than one occasion, Benjamin, perhaps unwittingly, invokes the aspect of sound in language, writing that the "basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" (82). This invocation of the "tongue," which typically stands in for "language," also points to the physicality of the language as it is expressed orally, thus emphasizing the role that the aural language plays in translation. This is typically at odds with semantic meaning when moving between certain languages, and therefore sound is often set aside in poetic translations. However, if we take literally this call to let the language be "powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" then it makes sense to consider how the original language, when sound is maintained, *sounds* in the target language.

Bernstein claims that "Letting the sound lead is crucial, or often crucial, for the sound may lead to the sense" (200). Instead of striving for sense from the isolated translation of meaning word-by-word, we may let the sound show the way in order to test Benjamin's proposition for the translator to "release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (82). This is a radical re envisioning of "re-creation" at a sonic level where we must set aside (at least temporarily) the compulsion to adhere to literal meaning and consider a poem as something more complex than line-regulated writing. Perhaps then, homophonic translation serves as a new horizon for poetic translation. It is the mode in which the sound,

the syntax is preserved from the original, but the translator must make a poem out of their own language in order to give something to the original. They have given due representation to the original and breathed life of a new language into it, stretching the significance of the original even at its moment of conception *and* pushing the limits of the target language to incorporate the sound and structures of poetic syntax from outside of it.

At this point it makes sense to turn to an example of such translation, in order to see how it works and makes use of its source. As an illustration of the Zukofskys' translations I'd like to triangulate the distinction of their work, taking Catullus's poem numbered 85 as an example. The original Latin reads "Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requires. / nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior." In his 2013 collection of poetry, *Recalculating*, Charles Bernstein translates "85" as "Hate and love. Why's what?, you'd ask / Don't know, I feel it and it's torture." (136). Then, in the Zukofskys' translation, "85" is rendered as, "O th'hate I move love. Quarry it fact I am, for that's so re queries. / Nescience, say th' fiery scent I owe whets crookeder" (*Complete Short Poetry* 310).

As we can see in this comparison, the general effect of the Zukofskys' translation, content-wise, is not much different from Bernstein's; hate and love are present, questions, not knowing, and then pain. But the Zukofskys have managed to convey a similar semantic message while preserving the music of the original; for instance, note the sonic promiximity between "quare id faciam" and "Quarry it fact I am," which produces a peculiar English that is somehow able to preserve "literal" meaning while at the same time translating the sound into a different language. Ezra Pound had attempted such a task in translating Catullus and found it impossible, choosing to translate his work into prose. Here I provide another example, first the original and then the translation,

<div align="center">Original   English Translation</div>

Original	English Translation
Furi, villula vestra non ad Austriflatus	Furious, "Little Villa" has no not for Auster,
opposita est neque ad Favoni	Flaw to oppose a taste naked to Favonius,
nec saevi Boreae aut Apheliotae	Nor sighs with Boreas, out Apheliotes.
verum ad milia quindecim et ducentos.	Worms eats and mill it fifteen thousand two hundred
O ventum horribilem atque pestilentem!	O vent them horrible, I'm out quite, pestilent mm.

<div align="right">(Complete Short Poetry p. 257)</div>

A first glance might produce the recognition of the use of cognates in translation, which gestures toward common grounds of intention across language, such as "Furi" to "Furious". But what is more interesting is the departure from the original, "intended meaning" in pursuit of the phonic preservation, as shown in the final line of Zukofsky's translation. The movement from "pestilentem" to "pestilent mm" is a point of breakdown, where we find the limit of the capacity for English to incorporate and sponsor the Latin. While some methods of translation, what Benjamin refers to as the "fidelity" to the text," would seek to correct this in a way that would make sense to the reader of the translated text, Zukofsky uses it to put forth the "failure" of translation, for if the text is automatically to fail, then why obscure this through falsity? The effect of this breakdown is similar to the paratactic qualities of the writing in "A"-22/23, where the drastic juxtaposition of disparate poetic phrases produced a continuous, jarring effect which short circuits at each moment of disjunction. Zukofsky's translation is thus one that brings to the forefront the breakdown between languages, to show limits. The translation does not make much "sense," but its non-sense speaks to a relationship between languages that gives understanding to both, as acts of language instead of discrete deployments of language in poetry: it is an illustration of the space *between* languages, rather than of one language or the other.

This form of translation, then, may be less appealing to a reading public than for the translator or philosopher of language, like an experiment. The results show that, alas, there

are breakdowns between the two languages, and that this may be a more significant finding than whatever was to be gleaned from finally reading Catullus in a language one can understand. It speaks not only to the limitations of translation but to the limitations in the language Catullus had at his own disposal.

The themes and examples of translation discussed thus far are, admittedly, narrow in the scope of translation studies. I have not taken up the more wordly aspects of translation, whose importance extends far beyond the notion of homophonic translation or the consideration of the translator as an artistic force. Not all texts support an ethical application of such a translation, as it puts forth the translator over the original author, and this is the last thing needed in the kind of translation ethics advocated by Gayatri Spivak. We might consider homophonic translation as a useful exercise in the Benjaminian pursuit "purer" relationship between poetics and language, where a reevaluation of the poetic tensions between English and French may be explored in a "new" translation of Mallarmé, as an example. There is a time and place for asserting the politics of translation, and those devoted to aesthetics divorced from the real world are not the ones to take up representation for the realities of other languages or worlds, but perhaps homophonic translation might serve to speak to a poetics of translation, where that relationship between languages, the failures that occur in the in between, are placed front and center as an independent point of inquiry.

"A"-21

"A"-21 is a translation of the play *Rudens* by the Roman playwright Plautus (c.254 BC-184 BC). Zukofsky began the poem in mid-august 1966, finishing in only six months, which was a significantly shorter effort than the production of the Catullus translations

(Scroggins 398). Zukofsky found striking similarities between *Rudens* and Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, and believed that Shakespeare had taken inspiration from Plautus in this work, an opinion Scroggins identifies as "a minority, if not lone, opinion" (399). The play is dedicated in part to, his brother Morris Ephraim, who had died shortly after Zukofsky commenced work on "A"-21, but whom Zukofsky credited as being the one to introduce him to poetry and the theater.

A comedy written in the late 2nd century BC, the play tells the story of Palaestra who, after being kidnapped by pirates as a child, is serendipitously reunited with her father Daemones, through his encounter with her pimp, Labrax. *Rudens* is a complicated story due to its comedic qualities, which obscure the clarity of the story and the resolution of its events, particularly in the pleasure Daemones takes in listening to the arguments over the propriety of Palaestra and the trunk containing proof of her identity. The trunk is discovered by the slave-fisherman Gripus, Daemones' slave, who pulls it up by the rope (of the title of the play) and is what eventually leads her to be reunited with Daemones and her mother, Daedalis.

Marc Scroggins identifies the play as a homophonic translation, but this is not entirely the case. Zukofsky's translation follows the story of *Rudens* but in the form of five-word lines. The immediate effect of this method, when compared to many English translations, is the speed of the story, as the reduced number of words expressing the same amount of plot produces a quickened pace. On the strangeness of the text, Scroggins writes,

> Not merely is the sound of the verse alien, but the syntax, compressed to an absolute minimum, begins to fragment. At times the language seems to explore the furthest reaches of late-1960s countercultural hipness; at others, it seems almost unbearably oblique and hard to follow—an odd effect, particularly in a movement of his poem

that seems particularly concerned with the values of the drama, an inherently public

art (Poetry of Knowledge 38)

With respect to movements "A"-22/23, "A"-21 and the final movement, "A"-24, occupy

radically different generic forms. While 22/23 may be considered more traditional in the

sense of their recognizability as poetry – line breaks, etc. - the inclusion of a full seventy-

page dramatic piece within the larger framework of a poem is experimental to say the least.

However, this is not to say that "A"-21 is without poetic features. In fact, it follows rather

closely the prosody of "A"-22/23 in terms of form, as Zukofsky uses the same five-word line

structure that he continually turns to and perfects throughout his later poetic career.

Similar to the translations of Catullus, we can see the preservation of sound in

Zukofsky's translation of the first line: "pro di immortals, tempestem quoius modi" (Plautus

412) translated to "Prodigal immortals what a tempest" (*"A"* 442). The combination of

producing a line-for-line translation *and* maintaining the phonetic qualities as much as

possible render "A"-21 into a cribbed version of the original in which the contents of the play

are blown through. The ambiguity that this produces has an effect that is somewhat

antithetical to the inherently public nature of theatre. The inclusion of the play within a poem

makes sense with respect to the cryptic qualities of the other movements of *"A"*, but

paradoxically it makes very little sense as a theatrical work, which Scroggins dubs "an

assault on the audience."

Zukofsky translates even the names of the characters. On the first page of the

movements, there are two columns, "Personae" on the left and "Characters" on the right. In

the left column are the names of the characters as they appear in the original, and on the right

are Zukofsky's alterations of those names. Not all of the names are changed but some are:

Sceparnio Servus becomes "Scape"; Palaestra becomes "Polly"; Gripus Piscator becomes

"Greave"; "Daemones Senex" becomes "Dads" (*"A"* 438). These emendations bring the

proper nouns of the Latin into the 20th century, particularly in Polly and Dads' names, and

this also occurs in the translation of Plautus' original into more colloquial English. By setting

up the Personae next to Characters, Zukofsky diagrams the movement of translation in a way

that is typically on available in bilingual editions, bringing the textuality of the original into

the present.

An interesting point of departure for reading "A"-21 is a significant formal distinction

between it and the original, in the inclusion of the sections marked "(Voice[s] off)," which

are not present at all in the Latin. As a translation it seems fitting to pay close attention to

moments of difference, where Zukofsky is drastically playing with both the content of the

original, and with the form of the theatre The first of these reads,

> *nine*
> *men's*
> *morris*
>
> this
> is
> my
> Form
>
> a
> voice
> blown (*"A"* 445)

In this instance, the original moves directly from one speaker (Scape) to the other (Polly),

without the off-stage interjection. But this passage serves as an excellent capsule for broader

themes in the play: revision of the historical, updating, and the interjection of the personal

into the work itself, as "morris" may represent Zukofsky's brother mentioned in the

dedication to the movement, as well as a reference to Titania's speech in Act II, Scene I of *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream. The characterization of the voice as "blown" evokes the timbre

of the horn in a musical sense, correlating the human voice and, by extension, poetry with the

musical instrument, a theme which is present from the very first page of *"A"* in the

invocation of Bach's *Passion of St. Matthew*. This takes the quality of performance inherent

to drama and multiplies it, making it also a musical affair by adding a further performative

and generic element. With the above-mentioned obscurity of its breakneck language and the

addition of original material, Zukofsky is creating a rowdy spectacle of the performance of

Rudens which simultaneously contracts language and blows up the performative aspect. It is

in this sense that we may understand "A"-21 not only as a translation of *Rudens* but as a

staged performance or adaptation of it, but one that is somewhat self-negating: the public art

that is almost impossible to follow; the translation that is really producing its own new

material, and in the context of the translator's own poem.

Bob Perelman addresses these paradoxical and self-negating qualities in "A"-21 as

well. Of the lines "a / voice / blown," Perelman writes that "in Elizabethan usage 'blown'

would designate a voice that has flowered to perfection; as contemporary slang it implies

fatigue or failure" (213). This appeal to contradictory etymologies is a characteristically

Zukofskian move, where the history of a word is employed to both multiply and obscure its

meaning in the poem. The middle lines, "this / is / my / form," constitute a similarly

contradictory claim considering its position within a translated work, though, at the same

time of course, in a section of a translated work that does not occur in the original. Perhaps it

is a claim on homophonic translation or the five-word line; Perelman adds to this list

"Shakespeare's writing and the organic folk dance presumably behind it, the ambiguously

blown voice, and the whole project of translating Plautus, identifying with Plautus, and producing writing that is in social terms utterly distant from Plautus" (213).

In the same way that Benjamin calls for translator's to allow the source language to have a pronounced effect on the tongue of the target language, Zukofsky's translation of *Rudens* uses the form of the play bring together two languages as they are sounded out at once. David Wray refers to Zukofsky's translation as "a language one knows, but knows only as 'foreign' and so must construe, actively, tentatively, with all the receptivity and respect of heightened awareness: an American English *that asks to be read as if it were Latin*" (60, my emphasis). And while I agree with Wray's determination that "A"-21 is an "acknowledgement of relation" (99), Zukofsky always takes it as his point to incorporate as much historical material as he can, so that it is never simply a line drawn between only two historical moments. In another of these voice-off sections, a peculiar archaic quality creeps in. However, this quality is not archaic in the classical Latin sense, but in the medieval English sense, as the off-stage voices sound "*great / ones eat up little ones: / that gives heauen countlesse / Eyes to view mens actes.* (457). The first alarming feature is the shift to a spelling of Renaissance-era English. It is evident in this passage that something funny is happening temporally, with archaic English spelling occurring in a Latin translation that is for the most part a kind of colloquial American English. Furthermore, the italicized sections are, in fact, quotations. Here, in the translation of the Roman play is a citation from Act I, Scene I of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, spoken by Pericles. The evocation of archaic English in this passage has the effect of homogenizing that tongue with the past of Plautus: one old world, with the poet looking back and adding the intermediary Shakespeare to the heap of literary history. Zukofsky's translation acts like Dante moving through the Inferno

and all of its inhabitants, from different times, living together at once. Again, this is a matter

of integration, where Zukofsky, through translation, makes more whole the writing of the

past as they are considered in the eyes of one contemporary poet.

   Even the plot of the play itself speaks to this tendency toward integration, as it centers

around bring Polly back to her family. During the scene in which she becomes shipwrecked,

while only briefly before reuniting with her friend, she cries out,

> I will never know here.
> Show me the way out
> Someone, show me a narrow
> Path – here or there riddles,
> Nothing here grows I see.
>   (*"A"* 446)

Polly's plea for release from this isolation is underscored by the comedic irony of the

situation, that throughout the play she is, in fact, with her father, or at least nearby. But

because "nothing here grows" indicates that the space is hermetically sealed off points to the

need to escape in order to reconnect, so that growth of sight and self may occur. It is a call to

reach back out, rhizomatically, and create connections that have been severed. Furthermore,

the first line's connection between knowing and place, "I will never know here," speaks to a

placelessness that is affected by the disconnection. The "here" is meaningless without

external contrast – she doesn't even know where "here" is – and the same may be said for

writing, especially when recalling Deleuze and Guattari's criticism of the Total Book that

seeks to cut itself off from everything else. Zukofsky's practice of translation, however,

reconnects these disparate, isolated elements across time, which can be seen even in the

play's title.

Rudens translates as "*The Rope*", and the place of the rope in the complicated plot should be mentioned, as well as its relationship with Zukofsky's poem. The rope used by the fisherman Greaves to pull up the trunk containing Polly's belongings, and thereby saving her, is an example of a device which ties an otherwise disparate chaos together. For Zukofsky, the rope serves as an important metaphor for the themes of time and history that are presented throughout *"A"* and have been surveyed throughout the last chapter of this project. Wray identifies the rope as a "synechdochic metaphor of [the play's] fortuitously concatenated sequence of events" (60). The significant line "no key to the tangle," from which I derived the title to my project, mirrors the rope as necessarily knotted; to pull at the line would unravel the whole, and the tension of the rope, which keeps in order the connection between past/future, here/there, I/eye, would come undone.

<div align="center">

"A"-24

</div>

Ronald Johnson, an American-born poet coming of age in the wake of the Black Mountain school of poets, recognized the significant influence of Zukofsky in the "Afterword" to his own life-poem *ARK* (composed between 1970 and 1990, and first collected in 2013). However, Johnson sets his own aims in *ARK* apart from what he sees as the common thread between Zukofsky, Pound, and Charles Olson in their conception and inclusion of history in poetry. Johnson writes, "If my confreres wanted to write a work with all of history in its maw, I wished, from the beginning, to start all over again, attempting to know nothing but the will to create, and matter at hand" (Johnson 311). As a side note, I would argue that Johnson's work in fact displays a very conservative take on the epic tradition, and is more guilty of denying his debt to history than actually starting over. I would perhaps agree with Johnson's desire to part from the methods of Pound (who starts with

Homer's Odyssey in translation), or Olson (whose *Maximus Poems* begins with a strong

assertion of epic-hero Will), or even Williams' *Paterson*, which starts with a beginning as

well and concerns itself, like Olson's, with the history of a place. But I would argue that

Johnson has misconstrued the concept of history as Zukofsky has set out to deal with it.

Pound's desire to write the "poem including history" is not the same for Zukofsky. *"A"* does

not try to *contain* or circumscribe history within the sphere of the individual poet; history is

not at its center and Zukofsky knows better than anyone that history *cannot be contained*.

What Zukofsky does in his writing is, if we continue the model of circumscription, put his

poem at the center, and break the circle apart, so that the poem may begin to reach back out

and connect itself to the events, persons, artistic creation, sounds, and troubles of history, and

no piece of Zukofsky's entire *oeuvre* exemplifies this more than the final and 24th movement

of *"A"*, wherein all these disparate elements are proven to be not that disparate at all.

Beginning work in December of 1966, "A"-24 was arranged by Celia Zukofsky and

given to her husband as a gift in March of 1968 (Scroggins 411-12). Originally entitled "L.Z.

Masque," and only later chosen as the most fitting ending to his lifelong work, "A"-24 is a

setting of various pieces of Zukofsky's writing to the harpsicord pieces by German composer

George Frideric Handel. The written pieces Celia drew from span every genre Zukofsky had

worked in, and are divided by genre into the four voices of the masque (with Handel's pieces

serving as the fifth "voice"): "Story," from the collection of fiction *It Was* (1959);

"Thought," from the collection of essays, *Prepositions* (1968); "Drama": from the play *Arise,*

Arise (1962); and "Poetry," all of which is drawn from earlier sections of *"A"*.[7]

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[7] At this point I would like to briefly clarify a formal issue in writing about "A"-24. As the entire movement is set to musical notation, with the four voices occurring simultaneously, there is no numbering of lines. Thus, in referring to sections of the movement I will specify the page on which the line occurred, as well as the initial for

The question of authorship in "A"-24 is an interesting one. The music is accredited to Handel, though on the recommendation of the Zukofskys' son, Paul. All of the words were written by Louis, though we know by now that even "his" words often belong to others. And "A"-24, as a whole, was fashioned together by Celia. Whereas in "A"-21 the historical engagement occurred between Zukofsky and Plautus, "A"-24 is a much more collaborative and multifaceted project. In many ways it is an engagement between Zukofsky *and himself*, for, although it is Celia who really produced the masque, the inclusion of "A"-24 as the last movement of *"A"* shows Zukofsky rehashing his own work in the same exact way he has done with Bach, Shakespeare, Spinoza, Marx, Chaucer, Adams, etc. throughout the entire poem.

The combination of the five different generic voices takes what "A"-21 performs – a drama in the middle of a poem – and condenses it to a single movement set to another performative genre: five voices occurring simultaneously in a musical setting. This echoes the claim made in "A"-12 over 20 years before, a fulfillment of his own poetic manifesto, when Zukofsky wrote,

> I'll tell you.
> About my *poetics* –
>
> $$\int \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{music} \\[2em] \text{speech} \end{array}$$
>
> An integral
> Lower limit speech
> Upper limit music
>   (*"A"* 138)

---

the voice to which I refer: (S)tory, (T)hought, (D)rama, (P)oetry. For instance, in referring to a line of drama on page 725, I will cite: (*"A"* 725, D).

"A"-24 immediately poses a problem of reading. How is one to go about reading four

concurrent lines of writing at the same time? Even more, how does one do this *to music*? In

Celia's prefatory note to the masque, she specifies that "The words are NEVER SUNG to the

music" (*"A"* 564). The creates a tension from the start between music and speech, or rather it

sets the lower and upper limits of the piece: four genres of writing, occurring simultaneously,

set to music, never sung. However, there is a further note that the dynamics of the voices

should be dictated by the size of the font (from 10pt-12pt). In turn, there is a dynamics of

speech in this performance, though it must never become a voice that is singing. This

highlights, once again, the role of limits and liminalities in Zukofsky's writing; the voice is

like an asymptote that is to constantly approach the threshold of becoming-music but never

arrives. As an illustration of this counterpoint I've done my best to approximate the spacing

of measures 26-29 of Act I, Scene I,


```
T:      Homer:                                    to       "tune  in"
D:                              Steak – steak – steak –
              (sings the words to the notes of do, re, mi)
S: to some       more   than    myself
P:      harmony  --   /                                        That
```


Note that "Homer" and "harmony" are to occur on the same beat, sharing the sound of the

"h" but then moving apart after that. Yet, the next words of the Thought line indicate they are

tuning in, when they are not be sung at all, and have in fact tuned *out*. The repetition of the

word "steak," which seems to recall the "Food" section of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*,

is directed in the play to be sung along the major scale, but Celia specified that it is never to

be sung. What is a performer to do, or a reader to think? The juxtaposition of the fragmented

"to some more than myself" with "harmony" is the kind of multivocal poetic that is perhaps

only possible when one constructs a framework like this. Individually, these lines remain difficult to analyze, for what is typically contained in a single paragraph or verse is stretched out across pages of music, which also challenges the attention span of readers. It turns the poetic value of the lines inside out, as they only begin to open up when considered alongside each other. The opening of each voice in Act I, scene I, "Cousin: Lesson" shows that what is being entered is a realm of *sound*,

> And it is possible in imagination to divorce speech of all graphic elements, to let it become a movement of sounds. (566, T)

> This story was a story of our time. And a writer's attempts not to fathom his time amount but to sounding is mind in it. (566, S)

> Blest / Infinite things / So many / Which confuse imagination / Thru its weakness, / To the ear / Noises. (566-67, P)

In many ways, "A"-24 becomes an exercise in reading; reading slowly, deliberately so that we may hear the ways in which the voices interact. Peter Quartermain refers to "A"-24 as the exemplary illustration of what he calls Zukofsky's "instant entirety" (65). This is the whole career of an artist happening at once. The effect of moving through "A"-24 is like experiencing the life of Zukofsky in the very same way that Zukofsky curates the rest of history in "A"-22/23: not all of it is there, but the work that lingers remains piled up in its afterlife. This echoes Benjamin's writing of on the afterlives of works in translation, where "A"-24 functions as the "translation" of his life's writing into music, marking "the stage of continued life" (Benjamin 255). This is the proper rendering of life, exercised in the poem *of a life*. Benjamin writes of the responsibility of this rendering that

The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history, is credited with life. In the final analysis, the range of life must be determined by the standpoint of history rather than that of nature, least of all by such tenuous factors as sensation and soul. The philosopher's task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history.

Benjamin, "Task of the Translator," 255

This notion of the dynamic between life and history is not so different from what Zukofsky claims in his essay "An Objective": "The lens bringing the rays from an object to a focus. That which is aimed at. (Use extended to poetry)—Desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars" (*Prepositions+* 12). It is the expression of the responsibility to give due diligence in poetic (or general) representation and thought. This is perhaps the defining quality of Zukofsky's poetry, one that remains relevant even through the prolific development and broad scope of his writing. This is not the epiphanic poetry of the Romantics or even someone like Pound; it is about grappling with things as they exist within their own complicated web of history and interaction.

I am not typically keen on relying on statements by the author, and especially Zukofsky because in his lectures and interviews he always seemed so reticent to explain to others the work he saw as obvious in its aims, but at this point I'd like to address the foreword written for *"A"*, which encapsulates this concern for unity and recurrence:

> *not to fathom time but literally to sound it as on an instrument and so to hear again as much of what was and is together, as one breathes without pointing to it before and after. The story must exist in each word or it cannot go on. The words written down – or even inferred as written over, crossed out – must live, not seem merely to glance at a watch.*
>
> Zukofsky, *Prepositions+*, 228 (his italics)

Zukofsky wrote this in 1967, several years before completing *"A"* and, interestingly enough,

before Celia completed and gifted to him the "L.Z. Masque." The feeling of simultaneity in

his poetry is captured by his idea that the "story must exist in each word or it cannot go on,"

where the whole must be present in each part, like fractals, and "A"-24 is that representation

of "what was and is together." Zukofsky is describing poetic consciousness as a kind of

whirlpool, where the neat divisions of period, genre, school, etc., are less relevant precisely

because they function as categorical divisions.

      The final bit of verse in *"A"* occurs at the end of the index specific to "A"-24, before

the full index begins. It reads,

      the gift—

      she hears

      the work

      in its recurrence

                L.Z.

Here Zukofsky acknowledges, first of all, Celia as the real creator of this text as it is. He also

considers it a product of *hearing*, not reading, that the work exists only because it came into

contact with someone else. It could not have become "A"-24 without it reaching out to

another set of eyes and ears and hands to make something new entirely out of things ready-

made. But most importantly, Zukofsky addresses the work recurrence. *"A"* has taken as its

main concern folding the historical – be that events or writing – into his own creative

process, so that the poetic subject he illustrates is one intensely aware of himself, too, as a

historical subject.

My concern in the previous chapter was Zukofsky's attempt to bring together disparate historical events, persons, and materials into a new poetic assemblage that embraced what Benjamin would call now-time, turning away from historical plot-based story toward a disjointed heap of history that could serve as a model for new poetic possibilities. "A"-22/23 are a process of integration, the metaphor so aptly applied by Zukofsky himself. "A"-21, even, is the embodiment of that integration, though it is *enacted*, not told; rather than taking history as a subject matter through which to advance new poetic methods, "A"-21 takes literary history, and performs it through a highly idiosyncratic translation that manages to integrate Plautus, Shakespeare, the five-word line, Zukofsky's personal life, and the rest of *"A"* all at once. Again, "A"-24 is the full illustration of integration, in a formal sense, through its incorporation of such disparate genres of writing; it is the microcosm and realization of the major thrusts of *"A"*.

However, this characteristic of unification and incorporation is one that occurs on the level of its poetic construction, and for the rest of this chapter I will turn to what I consider to be the real value of "A"24: its dissemination and destruction. For if "A"-24 is able to show an immense capacity for integrating differing elements, it is equally, and perhaps even more profoundly, capable of *disintegrating*. I would like to propose a theoretical concept to explain this capacity for disintegration: *escape-work*.

Escape-work

A few clarifications are in order. First of all, my use of the term escape-work does not signify "work" in the nominal sense, but in the verbal sense. This is, in part, a response to Roland Barthes' essay "From Work to Text," which I will address shortly. The goal here is

to, in the spirit of the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, see how the text *works* when it is performed through its circulation. My reading of "A"-24 was a catalyzing experience in what I saw as a need for a framework to think about writing that seemed to, at least try to, transcend the limitations of itself *as* writing. Instead of remaining closed off to the outside, escape-work encompasses the formal or conceptual method(s) through which a work of art dodges, dissolves, subverts, recodes, and disappears from its own discursive mode. Escape-work affects the machinations of the work of art that *reach out* and seek to reconnect with the external. An acknowledgement of the etymology of "escape" will show the physical nature of its definition, as a combination of the Latin roots *ex*, meaning "out," and *cappa*, signaling "cloak," the word may be understood as "going away while hidden."

I would consider escape-work to be relevant to works of art that resist linearity; incorporate features which gesture outside of the text, create holes in it; are maintained within a dominant genre (novel, western film, portrait painting, etc.); exhaust their own generic or thematic limitations. Additionally, these works may utilize other artistic modes to open texts to the outside and gesture to the limitations of their own genres, as well as their affinities with others.

In his lecture on "Multiplicity," collected in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Italo Calvino addresses the state of encyclopedism in the modern novel. And while his concerns rest mainly in the novel, along with his reliance on Ovid and Lucretius, I believe that his ideas apply equally to the modern long poem, and in particular a poem like *"A"*. Calvino says that "The world expands until it becomes ungraspable, and for Proust it is through the suffering of this ungraspability that we come to knowledge" (Calvino 136). *"A"* is just a work that brings to the notion of the ungraspable to the forefront, with its encyclopedic

tendencies, as a discuss at the end of Chapter I, showing at least one way through which we

seek to cope with an overwhelming amount of knowledge. He goes on,

> what if it were possible for a work to be conceived beyond the self, a work that
>
> allowed us to escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to ender
>
> other similar selves but to give voice to that which cannot speak – the bird on the
>
> gutter, the tree in spring and the tree in autumn, stone, cement, plastic…
>
> Calvino, 152

Calvino's evocation of an "escape" has led me, in part, to propose this concept for reading

tendencies of a work, like *"A"*, which seeks to move passed conceptual limitations in order

to release the voices, affects, and connections that are stilted by such limitations. This is the

dissolving of boundaries, attempted or fulfilled, that are the aim of *escape-work*.

In order to foreground some of theoretical influence to my use of this term, I would

like to briefly address Barthes' "From Work to Text." His essay functions as a proposition

for a new category of literary (and by extension cultural) production and accorded methods

of reading the movement from, as the title indicates, a work to a text, defined by Barthes

(obliquely) through a series of comparisons on concepts such as plurality, computability,

filiation, etc. The impetus for this distinction, Barthes argues, stems from the rise of

Marxism, anthropology, Freudianism, and semiotics, all of which he credits with "a certain

change [that] has taken place (or is taking place) in our conception of language and,

consequently, of the literary work" of that language, giving way to a new category, "Text,"to

overturn the former category, "work" (1277). In short, what Barthes is advocating is a new

system of considering the text as a phenomenon with respect to the language in which it was

written, which primarily means a turn towards less deterministic modes of reading, modesof

reading that double as acts of writing the Text at hand, so readers should "try to abolish (or at the very least diminish) the distance between writing and reading, in no way by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining them in a single signifying practice" (Barthes 1281). However, this also signals the textualization of the reader.

As a main component in the relinquishing of the text to the reader, though not totally, Barthes denies the paternal filial connection associated with critics like Harold Bloom and his concept of "anxiety" and treats the author simply as a character of the text. This can be a productive model of reading which levels author with text, but in certain cases, which will be addressed, this is a dangerous practice to adopt. In this sense, it seems that Barthes, in preserving the possibilities for play in the reading/writing act, must sever certain concrete connections with the text in order to maintain the possibility of a holistic intertextuality. One instance of this is Barthes' distinction between the work as object and the Text as "methodological field," where "the work can be held in hand, the Text is held in language" as writing that flees, as language often does (Barthes 1278). This "methodological field," and the most extreme expansion of it, is the realm of escape-work.

I can think of no better model for this than "A"-24. As I have addressed above, a distinguishing feature of the movement is that no "new" work was composed for it, for it is entirely composed of earlier writings, yet the movement *itself* stands as the new work. That it represents an original work in spite of these peculiarities is part of what makes "A"-24 a fitting example of escape-work. Because the writing is still all Zukofsky's own, it does not attempt to erase the author; if anything, the author is anthologized within his own work. However, this does not render the poem a closed system, because it is still fundamentally collaborative. The selections were not made by the author, but by the collator, and as a

musical setting, Handel, too, becomes another "collaborator." All of these aspects make "A"-24 a challenge in artistic taxonomy: Is it a poem? A song? A work of visual art? The questions elicited by the work insure that it will remain open to the outside – its intertextuality, to other texts by Zukofsky and other authors altogether, to the poet's life and the reality of the poem's composition; its problematizing of concrete artistic genres and their classification – all these uncertainties, while still symptomatic of a "difficult" poem, nevertheless make it a poem *of this world*, as it does not seek to separate itself and, in fact, seems only ever to strive towards incorporating more and more of the world around it.

In "Literature as Life," Deleuze asserts that "[w]riting is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experienced," and should be a social field of engagement which "begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say 'I'" (Deleuze 1-3). This is a very different formulation than the one implied in *A Thousand Plateaus*; it is not a denial of the "I," but the multiplying of the self *from within* so that the self is not erased but connected to another intrinsically, which in the case of "A"-24 means connecting to others as much as multiplying the self and connecting to those new selves. In the most pronounced celebration of language's potential, Deleuze writes,

> As Proust says, [literature] opens up a kind of foreign language within language, which is neither another language nor a rediscovered patois, but a becoming-other of language, a minorization of this language, a delirium that carries it off, a witch's line that escapes the dominant system… They are not interruptions of the process, but breaks that form part of it, like an eternity that can only be revealed in a becoming, or

a landscape that only appears in movement. They are not outside language, but the

outside of language (5)

This concept of an "outside of language" echoes the integral established by Zukofsky in "A"-12 of "upper limit music / lower limit speech," for the approach of the limit (which is not reached) is precisely the model of becoming. "A"-24 is building that "social field of engagement" which is not a product of some singular creative genius but a poet willing to acknowledge other writing, and give to new life to it, by breathing with it in his own work. Deleuze's idea that powerful writing engages in a process of "becoming-other" than writing has led me to this conclusion that Zukofsky's writing is ripping apart the limitation of the book that restrict its ability to move outside of itself, to enter the world that excludes it as a book and not of reality apart from being only a book. In *"A"*, Zukofsky posits that books do not have a single author, and instead of obscuring that, he uses that multivocality to destabilize poetry as a thing purely written.

Moving Out

While Zukofsky is certainly an under-discussed poet, his influence has spread through certain groups of poets. The qualities which I have surveyed above – particularly his ability to push the limits of writing as a communicative tool – are prescient to the loose group of radical poets of the late 1970's associated with *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine. Rather than spin the wheels of Zukofsky, I find that it would be more productive at this point to see the afterlife of his work, and through a brief look into the Language poets, consider how Zukofsky's writing is amplified as we hear it in its recurrence.

Zukofsky's work, and *"A"* in particular, have served as a model for the lengthy poetic

projects of Language poets like Ron Silliman's *The Alphabet*, Bernadette Mayer's *Studying*

Hunger, and Hannah Weiner's *The Code Poems*. He is also the focus of the conclusion of the

collected works in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles

Bernstein, wherein several Language poets pay homage to the influence and complexity of

Zukofsky's writing. While Zukofsky poetry is in fact not particularly in keeping with the

tenants of the Language school, his work represents a distinct approach to poetics that still

seems to have yielded a similar poetic effect. The primary correlation between Zukofsky and

this later movement is the mechanics of eliding interpretation through the foregrounding of

the word over syntagmatic interpretability. *"A"* is precisely the work that "cannot be

computed," as Barthes writes, denying adherence to most models of poetic analysis at the

time of its publication, advocating that the words of the poem be read *as they are*. This is not

a prescriptive advocacy for arriving at one meaning or another, but a compulsion to read the

words as words *on a page* and not as referents to sound or other ephemeral phenomena. As

an example of a shorter work, Zukofsky's poem "I's (pronounced *eyes*)" begins,

> Hi, Kuh
> Those
> gold'n bees
> are I's,
> eyes,
> skyscrapers. (*Complete Short Poetry*, 1-6)

While many critics have indicted Zukofsky's writing as hermetic or intentionally alienating

to readers, it is more productive to take up a method of reading that views the text as an open

one. This poem in particular is an instance of a seemingly distant text that only necessitates a

reading of the word, *as word*, treating the poem as that "methodological field" outlined by

Barthes, and not an object which demands sorting. The opening pun that mimics the sound of

"haiku" is somewhat of a temptation, for as we may find a productive correlation between the invocation of the haiku form and the sparse wording of the poem, we may also consider the spelling provided, and recognize the written quality of the poem, not only the sound implied (if it is at all) by the aural proximity. The only other readily identifiable prosodic technique present here is the rhyming I/eye/sky vowels, a linked progression which marks, as a transformation, the movement from subjective self (I) to the isolated act of perception (eye) to the field of vision external to the body (skyscraper). Additionally, we can notice that these three may rhyme in the plural as well, with the misleading "visual" rhyme of "I's," "eyes," "skys," but since this is not how the word is properly spelled, attention is drawn to the discrepancy between written and sounded word, giving a further sense of the material status of the poem as a text and not an oral performance.

This shift in poetic perspective away from the Romantic "I" echoes Barthes' views of the relations between author and Text. His determination that the Text "reads without the inscription of the Father," a status abstractly held by author (or God), the typical filial relation to the Text, whose "life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work," disrupts the impulse to revert back to intention as a guide for reading (1280). While Barthes maintains that this is an aspect of textuality and not intention, Zukofsky actively tries to sublimate the author and intention through a poem that *creates* associations, without relying on the referentiality of Romantic mythology or High Modernist intellectual obscurity. This marks a movement from theory into application that would later filter into the writing of the Language poets, who would take Barthes' author-made-character and make a disappearing act of it.

I believe it is useful to highlight an anecdote from Zukofsky's biography that illustrates this capacity of disintegration in light of the developments of American poetics in the wake of Zukofsky's death in 1978. Mark Scroggins, in *The Poem of a Life*, gestures towards what he identifies as a prophetically symbolic moment at a memorial to the poet shortly after his death. At San Francisco State University, poet and friend of Zukofsky, Robert Duncan, gave a talk and reading which emphasized the beauty of Zukofsky's lyricism and their personal relationship as a kind of farewell to his late friend. However, the subsequent speaker, Language poet, Barrett Watten, took the stage only to begin speaking about the irrelevance of Zukofsky as a man, pivoting to discuss both the contradictions in and the value of his poetry in purely theoretical and political terms. Duncan's outrage at the insensitivity of such a performance led him to interrupt the poet, and Scroggins claims that this marked a clear division in a formerly (quasi)united camp of avant-garde poets for decades to come (Scroggins 463-465). These two camps may be understood as the sentimental lyricists (Duncan), and the impersonal radicals (Watten and the Language poets).

This anecdote of the purely analytic and critical reading of a hero like Zukofsky is useful in considering the Language poets as being even more distinctly removed from the tradition characterized by the Romantics, carried through Eliot, and even, perhaps unwittingly, perpetuated by those belonging to the New York School and the Beats. Eschewing that "I" that Virginia Woolf identifies looming in the background of all singularly male texts, the Language poets were responsible for a turn away from what Lee Bartlett calls "the Wordsworthian sense of the poem's task—to recall through a fixed and definable identity a moment in time and space" (744-745). Turning now, then, to some examples of

this movement we may begin to conceptualize how the Language Poets began pulling at the thread between text and society, only to stitch them back in reverse.

It should be stated clearly that the categories that grouped the Language poets together were not so much aesthetic as philosophical and political. As Scroggins notes of the generational gap between writers like Duncan and those like Watten, the younger generation were not the sentimental artist-type, but instead a group of mostly highly politically-active Marxists trained in the then-burgeoning field of poststructuralism, as well as studying, like Bernstein did, analytic philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein. This represents a certain shift in background for the class of writers, who considered themselves as much critics as they did poets, and so there was no need to differentiate between the textual byproducts of each occupation.

In the preface to *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, "Repossessing the Word," editors Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein write as a mission statement, "we have emphasized a spectrum of writing that places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program, or subject matter. All of these remain at issue," an going on to emphasize that one overarching goal of the movement has been to "generate discussion on the relation of writing to politics, particularly to articulate some of the ways that writing can act to critique society" (iv-v). While these motives are, perhaps intentionally, broad, they do indicate a radical shift in the desire to politicize poetry through a renewed attention to the nuances and potential horizons of writing when one is dedicated to the construction of the language itself more so than its ability to accurately communicate thought   .

For all of Barthes's understanding of reading/writing, the materiality of the text does not *physically* shift; in a typical poststructuralist move we might say that it does, but Barthes's assertion conflates perception with embodiment. But what the Language poets were responsible for was not only producing new kinds of texts which demanded a different way of reading than poems before, but creating new ways of writing as an affirmation of the boundless possibilities of human language, and beyond that to the potential for using that language to shape new political realities. The implication of this mindset is the reinvigorated responsibility on the part of the poet; it is not enough to liberate reading practices as long as literary production remains constrained by traditions of literary markets.

Jed Rasula, in his essay "Statement on Reading in Writing," flips the model of reading/writing discussed by Barthes to address writers, first-and-foremost, as readers. He argues that the only real writers are those like Stephen King, with a market that is already waiting for any work he produces, for "[w]riters without such an immediate market are in the damning circumstance, more often than not, of trying to insist on themselves as *not readers*, against all odds, in service of the fetish of originality" (52). However, if one is to resist this fetish that a writer like Johnson in *ARK* claims of some pure creative spirit "is to pronounce oneself willing to work with other people" (52). Zukofsky is a powerful precursor to this idea as a writer who, despite being the only name on the spine of the book, is in constant conversation with other writers and thinkers.

A pivotal departure in the development of the Language school comes from poet Robert Grenier, who in the first issue of the little magazine *This*, published in 1971, wrote a piece consisting only of the line, "I HATE SPEECH." This is an apt illustration of the charged nature of much of the group's collective work, the negative celebration of the written

word over the "poetic voice" that dominated the lyrical tradition for so long. The lack of any traditionally formal poetic techniques in this statement put that much more emphasis on a contradictory tension to condemn the thing to which writing refers. The Language poets' vital attention to the categories of the sentence and the word does not necessarily invite a traditional formalist reading, which would ignore the significance of the role of process, becoming and chance in the poetry of this movement. Furthermore, it would be antithetical to the thrust of this analysis to claim a definitive interpretation of a text, let alone that of a Language poem. In turn, I wish only to provide a reading (writing) of two poems by Charles Bernstein as they contribute to further consideration of the poetic turn away from the subject to the writing itself which seeks to reach out from its isolation.

Bernstein's poem "As If the Trees By Their Very Roots Had Hold of Us," from his early collection*, Senses of Responsibility*, works as a wonderful case study for the meta-prosodic concerns of the Language school. It begins,

> Strange to remember a visit, really not so
> Long ago, which now seems, finally, past. Always, it's a
> Kind of obvious thing I guess, amazed by that
> Cycle: that first you anticipate a thing & it seems
> Far off (qtd. in *Senses of Respsonsibility* 1-5)

The enjambment of "that" and "Cycle" is, in a certain light, a meta-prosodic statement on the function of enjambment as a turning from one line to the next; a fundamental reading of a rather fundamental poetic technique. But if we consider the Language movement's desire to emphasize, over the traditional line, the sentence as the emblem of ordinary speech, then such an enjambment might represent an ironic poetic disruption of ordinary speech in favor of a fabricated, bourgeois form of poetic division, where traditions of length dictate structure

and not the language itself as a self-contradictory instance of how the artificial aspect of the line disrupts that ordinary speech.

  As an extension of the earlier discussion of Zukofsky's going beyond the authorial decentering outlined by Barthes, it is important to note the uncertain role of the subject in this poem. The three uses of the first-person pronoun "I" (there is no "me" in this poem) in this poem are all paired with indicators of uncertainty: "I guess," "I'm no longer sure," "What can I say here?" The author of the poem has not only removed himself a good deal by turning the attention to *our* predicament but, more importantly, has interrogated his own authority in the presentation of the thing. Any statement that stems from the typical subjective authority of "I" has folded itself back into the mix of uncertainty and confusion that permeates the whole of the poem.

There is also the constant awareness of becoming in the poem: all that is given at face-value is the invocation of process, rife with subtle contradictions. The resolution of "Always" in the second line is immediately followed by the uncertainty of "a kind of obvious thing I guess" in the next. This in-betweenness, the sensation of never having arrived results in a fully-abstracted, physical body, where we are "Eternally buzzing over the time, / Unable to live in it…," in a world where,

> Hope, which is, after all, no more than a splint of thought
> Projected outwards, "looking to catch" some*where* –
> What can I say here? – that the ease or
> Difficulty of such memories doesn't preclude
> "That harsher necessity" of going on always in
> A new place, under different circumstances:
> & yet *we* don't seem to have changed

This feeling of having lost something that perhaps was never obtained, be it a material desire, or the desire to communicate through language, is characterized as a "slipping away / 'Like

the sand through your fingers in an old movie,'" (8-9). By placing this line in quotations, it

implies a status of reference, but at the same time, it refers to nothing other than the sort of

nostalgia one would expect to be pulled from an old noir film. In this example, it is evident

that it is less the *actuality* of a citation that is significant than the *gesture* to a citation. In a

sense, this is the manner of introspection called for by Andrews and Bernstein, where reality

of reference becomes secondary to the act of referencing, for the effect is no less nostalgic.

The poem concludes,

> So, more of these tracings, as if by some magic
> Of the phonetic properties of these squiggles… Or
> Does that only mystify the "power" of "presence" which
> Is, as well, a sort of postponement (45-48)

This final line is emblematic of an important correlation between Barthes and Bernstein's

poem on the whole, in that its process "The Text… practices the infinite deferment of the

signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier" (Barthes 1279). This deferral, this

"postponement", is the longing to achieve a unity between "these squiggles" and the "power

of presence" that would allow the individual or the community to take the temporal or

physical planes, and finally live within them. But alas, the act of reading and (re)writing this

text positions places the reader in that same state of placelessness in language. Barthes writes

that The Text "is without closure" (1279), though instead of reading into a hopeless future,

one may choose to take up the real political cause from which the poem arises, a sense of

externally determined and perpetrated loss, and continue the attempt to grapple with the

potentials of language to finally create that unity, or approach it, through a passionate love

for the language and its ability to reaffirm one's own agency. But this idealist unity also runs

the risk of closing the text off from its exterior, which is principally antithetical to Barthes'

"methodological field" or the conception of the text as rhizomatic.

As a final example I turn to another Bernstein poem that is exemplary of a different side of

the Language poem, in which it is not so much the ambiguity of images that challenges the

reader, but the way in which it seems to speak out directly about itself, a poem with no

content other than its own unfolding description. The poem comes from the conclusion to an

experimental essay derived from a series of listserv posts made by Bernstein, and in it, he

takes this concept of the line as his subject,

> This line is stripped of emotion.
> This line is no more than an
> illustration of a European
> theory. This line is bereft
> of a subject. This line
> has no reference apart
> from its context in
> this line. This line
> is only about itself.
> This line has no meaning: its words are imaginary, its
> sounds inaudible…
> This line refuses reality. (qtd. in "Community and the Individual Talent")[8]

For all the criticism of the unreadability of Language Poets (which Zukofsky also received),

Bernstein's poem comes across as rather obvious: the uselessness of the writing act. It seems

to clearly implore us to understand that we are not reading what we are reading. We may in

fact take the poem at its face and conclude it to be nothing more than a product of French

theory, perhaps of Barthes' theories, specifically. That, first of all, his "lines" are not

contained to one line, and are enjambed, is an indication of the privileging of the sentence, or

a unit of ordinary speech, and upends any sense of certainty in the text due to this conflated

terminology. Secondly, the implication that each "This line" indicates an autonomous line,

produces the possibility that while "this line" might be "stripped of emotion," *this* (next)

line" might not be. Even within a potentially homogenous or repetitive poem, Bernstein takes

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[8] This poem was later published as "Thank You For Saying You're Welcome" in *Near/Miss* (2018).

as his subject the problems inherent to writing itself, these issues that must first be taken up on the grounds of language since it in turn is the mechanism by which reality is shaped. This is the main issue at stake for the Language poets: the entwined relationship between a language that dictates to a certain degree the material conditions of life and the practitioners of that language who are responsible for shaking loose from engrained forms of communicating through interrogation and experimentation with those forms. These are not simply poems about poetry, but poems that take on the burden of delineating new ways of being and engaging head on against established regimes of signs.

But despite his metaprosodic commentary, Bernstein, and by extension many other poets of the Language movement, are subject to a critique of serious consequences when certain poetic methods are taken to their logical end. There is certainly a value to the problematizing of the author-function in poetry, but what about when this perspective is applied to all authors? The result is a devaluing of author subjectivity, as well as subjectivity writ broad, when the idea of textualization overtakes the real world. There are perspectives outside of white American and European intellectuals that have much more to lose in their erasure.

In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Spivak addresses this issue in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Michel Foucault. Spivak validly charges the three thinkers with ignoring the real, material conditions of certain forms of oppression through the purely theoretical and idealistic frameworks they apply in their work. Responding to their notion of using theory like a "tool box," Spivak writes "Considering that the verbalism of the theoretical world and its access to any world defined against it as 'practical' is irreducible, such a declaration helps only the intellectual anxious to prove that

intellectual labor is just like manual labor" (70). Her identification of this conflation of two distinct kinds of labor (though this is not to deny the labor of intellectual work, only its important distinction) highlights an issue inherent to much of the theory of which Deleuze and Guattari are characteristic: the oversimplification of highly diverse conditions of labor and identity across the globe. This is symptomatic of the Marxist homogenization of all forms of labor into the proletariat, when in reality the variance across working and living conditions in different parts of the world are vast.

The same critique may be levied against the Language poets. Their brand of impenetrably difficult poetry, in which all concerns are made secondary to that of language, including identity, is eerily similar to Deleuze and Guattari's privileging of the text over the body and their tendency to homogenous difference in very attempt to uphold and celebrate it. The discussion of Bernstein's poetry and the uncertainty of its "I" figure is all good and well, until the same principle is applied to a poet who has very invested stakes in the message of *their* "I". The two cannot be the same; it is one thing to advocate for one's own textual disappearance (though we know this always stems from textual authority anyway), but in the polemic tendencies of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* there is the air of broad advocacy for their concepts, almost characteristic of a manifesto. This ignores writers producing work in very different conditions, writers who may already be in danger of having lost the ability to speak in the first-person, which is of course the primary concern of Spivak's essay.

While I agree with Spivak's critique of Deleuze and Guattari for their tendency to make ephemeral certain real, material conditions, it is nonetheless somewhat ironic considering that the two had attempted to articulate a similar critique, but of texts, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, as a part of the chapter "On Several Regimes of Signs." This is not to

say that her critique is misinformed, but in fact reinforces her criticisms because Deleuze and

Guattari choose to focus on the textual sign as the one of priority. Nevertheless, their analysis

of the sign is significant for its identification of the oppressive capabilities of texts, as well as

the replacement of the God-like figure of authority with the text that functions as God:

> It is now the book, the most deterritorialized of things, that fixes territories and
>
> genealogies. The latter are what the books says, and the former the place at which the
>
> book is said. The function of interpretation has totally changed. Or it disappears
>
> entirely in favor of a pure and literal recitation forbidding the slightest change,
>
> addition, or commentary. (Deleuze and Guattari 127)

Like any conversation on the relationship between theory and praxis, there are contradictions.

For the Language poets, it seems that the attempt to embody the theory in their poetry in

order to create a truly political and revolutionary poetics at the same time renders their work

myopic to their own prerequisite of social function, as theory-in-writing is not the same as an

actual enactment of political principles. In turn, their work suffers many of the same pitfalls

as that which they sought to overturn. The disavowal of authority intended through

displacing the author-figure can only ever stem from a certain authority to begin with, and

therefore self-displacement in the text remains a power-move. It aligns with the sort of book

that Deleuze and Guattari warn us against, "The unique book, the total work, all possible

combinations *inside* the book, the tree-book, the cosmos-book: all of these platitudes so dear

to the avant-gardes, which cur the book off from its relations with the outside, are even worse

than the chant of the signifier" (127). Furthermore, their critique, while made toward writing

in general, is most fitting to the poetic text with its lyric quality, for they argue that there "is

no longer a signifier-signified relation, but a subject of enunciation issuing from the point of

subjectification and a subject of the statement in a determinable relation to the first subject." This emphasis on the subject and their enunciation is characteristic of the poetic text and aligns this kind of text with divine enunciation found in Genesis. The poetic attempt to relinquish control and authority over one's own text actually renders the poet as authoritative as the word-thing made real upon God's own enunciation to let there be light.

Language writing, despite its theoretical issues, seems to be, above all, trying to create this "outside of language" by grounding itself in the sole focus of language. The aforementioned tendencies of Language poetry, as exemplified in Bernstein's "As If the Trees by Their Very Roots Had Hold of Us," can be considered along the lines set out by Deleuze above. When we consider the gesture toward intertextuality in the line "Like the sand through your fingers in an old movie," as not-quite-citation, we may understand how Bernstein is performing a kind of escape-work which seeks to reach toward a nostalgia outside of itself. Whether this "quotation" refers to anything concrete, it is the reaching that is of most significance. This reaching, along with the repeated language of uncertainty, resonates with Deleuze's notion of language and writing as always in a state of becoming. In turn, the poem should not be read as a lament of the condition of textuality, but as a single temporal cross-section which illustrates that break from a language which falsely proclaims itself as having arrived.

Conclusion

So how does "A"-24 escape itself? The closing to the final scene poses the question of "Whose voice shall I use now that I am near yours?" (803, D). That the poet considers relinquishing his voice for another's is hopeful enough, this willingness to remove oneself

from the center of one's own creative endeavor in order to let the work *breathe*. As a final comparison I turn to what I see as the work which seems to take Zukofsky's practice and push it to its furthest reaches.

Tan Lin's *7 Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004: The Joys of Cooking* is a self-described "ambient work." Its sub-subtitle, "[AIRPORT NOVEL MUSICAL POEM PAINTING FILM PHOTO HALLUCINATION LANDSCAPE]" is a telling description of the ambiguity in labeling the work, but its significance to this discussion rests in Lin's ability to create a text which speaks about itself so candidly while simultaneously performing the very concepts it postulates. Throughout the entire book there are claims that, "Poetry should…" "Poetry is…", etc. In an interview on Charles Bernstein's radio show, *Close Listening*, Lin expressed the desire to create a "reading environment" of generalities, citing Gertrude Stein's *Making of Americans* as an earlier model of a text which resists reading for detail, an opinion further expressed by Paul Stephens in *The Poetics of Information Overload*.[9]

What Lin's work contributes to this discussion is an extended model of the reading practices exemplified by Zukofsky's writing. "A"-24, although not quite airport or landscape, occupies the mediums of drama, prose, criticism, poetry, *and* music, disintegrating into a kind of ambient field of poetics. At the end of the first section of Lin's book, he describes this field,

> How to incite the idea of reading without reading? How to accessorize reading as a practice similar to entertaining? One comes and then one goes. One adds something and then one subtracts something.

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[9] Stephens advocates for "reading at" Stein's novel, as opposed to "reading through." Without an official recording of "A"-24, I would say that "reading at" it may be the only possible method, as I only have one set of eyes.

> The most precious commodity in modern life is time. I live in a house like a series of loops, plus signs

> +   -   (*7 Controlled Vocabularies* 38)

Here, Lin postulates a reading experience that is significant for its generality. The cyclicality of coming and going, adding and subtracting, is powerful because it is general, not occluding readers through specificity. He constructs, and calls for, a poetic system that retreats from author or intention. Lin's work exhibits a kind of Bakhtinian centrifugal quality, echoing Calvino assertion that "Even if a work's overall design has been meticulously planned, what counts is not its enclosure within a harmonious shape but rather the centrifugal force it releases, with its multiplicity of languages as guarantee of a truth that isn't partial" (143). When Lin writes that the "most beautiful book would be a 1:1 scale model of itself and divided into / Front / Back / *Like a Diary of Someone I Know,*" he simultaneously invokes the specificity of an exact replica, the subjective, personal nature of the diary, but obscured by the generality of "*Someone I Know*" (Lin 106).

Ronald Johnson's *ARK*, and the claims made by the author about the work, may be situated symmetrically with a poet like Lin. Johnson's desire to "start over" and create in a pure, unadulterated sense Lin shows in *7 Controlled Vocabularies* that he remains uninterested in the production of a poetic text that upholds any Romantic notions of creativity or artistic production. Instead, Lin seeks to create an environment of reading, what I would term a poetic field, wherein poetry as a distinguished art form ceases to be as such. This may be a troubling concept to some, that of a poetry which is indistinguishable from furniture or newspapers, but far from diminishing its value, it would bring poetry into our everyday lives. I find this to be far less pompous than Pop-Art conceptions of the elevating the everyday object to the status of high-art, which privileges art as somehow better than the quotidian.

Rather, this brings poetry out of a lofty realm of difficult interpretation and into Deleuze's notion of the "social field of engagement."

Johnson, a poet whose work I admire greatly, seems to cling to a tradition of poets asserting themselves, in a Bloomian sense, within a canon of older poets, a canon which is, in turn, intent on asserting itself through time moving forward. This is a desire to be remembered, to have one's work last through time when one is no longer present. But I find Lin's assertion that poetry is most beautiful when it is forgotten far, far less egotistical. Whether one agrees or not with Lin's proclamations, I do not read them as over-intellectualizing the art of poetry, as it is surprising the extent to which Lin is concerned with beauty, and in many ways, *7 Controlled Vocabularies* almost seems to resemble late 19ᵗʰ century writing on art, in the spirit of someone like John Ruskin. Lin's emphasis on remembering and forgetting is a diptych I would correlate to my prior occupation with Zukofsky's integration and disintegration. He writes that "[a]s anyone who has ever read a painting will tell you, paintings, like poems, are most beautiful [and least egotistical] at the exact moment in which they are forgotten, like disco" (Lin 22). This project has been mainly concerned with how historical material constituted Zukofsky's poetic production as a force of memory and absorption, but the most beautiful and compelling effect of Zukofsky's poetry is the way he constructs these systems of historical images and writing to signal *to the reader* that we have forgotten these things, like disco.

This division of a remembering-self and a forgetting-self calls to mind Jorge Luis Borges' story "Borges and I," in which the author grapples with distinguishing between himself and his author-function,

> I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others or in the laborious strumming

of a guitar. Years ago I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things. Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him.

I do not know which of us has written this page.

Collected Fictions, p. 324

The displacement of recognition, where he recognizes himself most in the strumming of a guitar is a salient image for the dispersal of the self through writing and reading. And although Borges' story takes on a melancholy tone regarding loss, it may also illustrate the complete dissolution of one's self in the world around. A reading of poetics which seeks to avoid the dangers of ignoring the real world in favor of the purely textual necessitates continued connection to and engagement with reality. Far from trivializing the poetic, this kind of consideration helps to make relevant the effects of poetic texts as works that can effectively speak to material conditions, not only intellectual ones, *as* materially conditioned phenomena. They may no longer deny their own reality, their own complicity, and, by extension, the very real effect they can play on the language we use to communicate, create, and resist. In the introduction to this project I aligned what Zukofsky fashioned in *"A"* as similar to what Walter Benjamin sought to create with *Passagenwerk*, what Benjamin referred to in a 1930 letter as "the theatre of all my struggles and all my ideas." But more than a theatre, or a dreaming city, what Zukofsky has done is build a house and open the windows, letting in or out what will.

Coda

"unhated unloved unseen": Looking Beyond *"A"*

To this point, the concerns of this project have been more or less centered solely on Louis Zukofsky's *"A"*. However, in a poem of epic scope, in terms of genre and general length, huge philosophical and artistic concerns may be expected. Additionally, when a work is so sustained, there is room to explore such massive epistemological and ontological concerns. Zukofsky spent close to half of a century producing *"A"*, what he called his "poem of a life," and so there are other concepts in the poem that could be explored along similar lines as I have pursued, but was not able to address for reasons of scale. For instance, despite the number of passages concerned with plants and animals, they have received little attention and there are no ecocritical or animal studies-based readings of Zukofsky available currently.

The last two projects of Zukofsky's life are, formally speaking, antithetical to the range of form(s) employed in *"A"*. But what I would like to acknowledge here are the currents that run through both, that Zukofsky is able to perform a similar kind of poetic without the space available in an 800-page poem. *80 Flowers* was the last completed work that Zukofsky produced in his lifetime, and consists of eighty poems (eighty-one with the preface), each dedicated to a different flower, most of which were present in the garden kept by Celia Zukofsky. The poems all follow the same structure: eights lines, five words per line. The five-word line seems to be the form Zukofsky developed most throughout the later period of his writing, and *80 Flowers* is an interesting case in that it takes the line structure that Zukofsky used in his most sprawling sections of *"A"*, movements 21-23, and reigns them in to only eight lines.

Structurally-speaking, we may see this as a natural progression of Zukofsky's practice of concision. Unlike the grand, historical themes of *"A"*, *80 Flowers* details what is more-or-less a simple domestic backdrop. It makes poetry from a rather unexciting scene: the backyard of the poet's home, taking the scope of world history in *"A"* to an exploration of the history and interconnectivity of plant life. Michele J. Leggott's insightful book, *Reading 80 Flowers*, is the most extensive study of Zukofsky's later poetics, and covers every flower in the collection, cross-referencing allusions and biographical relevance. Leggott even incorporates to some extent the themes of *"A"* into her reading of the last collection.

In turn, I find it fitting to conclude by extending the discussion outside of *"A"* and looking at the last poems of Zukofsky's life-writing, in order to consider how these themes of integration and disintegration function in poetry that is not as entangled as *"A"*. This should serve as a provocation for further scholarship on Zukofsky's writing, a necessity that has not been pursued actively in recent years. As one final reading, I turn to the image of the perennial succulent I addressed first in Chapter I's reading of "A"-22: "Liveforever,"

> Wild time *liveforever* horsethyme ice
> by shard green red-purple thyrse
> shadowed stone or a flurry
> troth *orpine* kin *acre* yellow-red
> *mossy stonecrop love-entangle* your kind's
> *roof houseleek old-man-and-woman* who woo
> thatch song quicksilver cold would
> won't know All *sedum* no
> <div align="right">(Complete Short Poetry 326)</div>

This particular plant is especially important to Zukofsky and his writing, and occurs as an image throughout *"A"* in "A"-1, 2, 7, 12, 15, 22, and 23, what Leggott refers to as "an engagement with time past" (Leggott 144). The inclusion of "Liveforever" as an entry in *80 Flowers* offers another instance of Zukofsky recycling themes across works. If *"A"* is a

model of recurrence, where the same names and images keeping coming back again and again, then "Liveforever" has subsumed all every instance of that image and contained in within a very brief poem. This recalls Zukofsky's aim for showing the story in every word so that we can read *"A" within 80 Flowers*.

This poem, despite its brevity, exhibits almost all of the qualities present in the larger passages of *"A"*. There is the punning of "time" with "thyme," as well as the addition of "roof" in front of "houseleek," which is another common name for *liveforever*. There is a tension drawn between written word and spoken word, a kind of a visual rhyme, in the juxtaposition of Cold/would and who/woo, which highlights a staggered musical quality, particularly in the latter example, where the sounding out of "woo" after "who" feels almost unnatural given the proximity of their sounds. The poem seems to mimic the partiality of the image "ice / by shard," signaling its own disjunction while also demonstrating its capacity to include, which Charles Bernstein would describe as belonging to "a poetics of assimilation and accommodation" (*Pitch of Poetry* 296).

Overall, the paratactic methods employed by Zukofsky are the defining feature of his poetry in which there is no cohesive sentence, let alone a narrative or clear scene. It calls back to Ezra Pound's ideogrammic method, best exemplified by his poem "In a Station of the Metro": "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough" (*New Selected Poems and Translations*). But whereas Pound enacts a disjunction between two rather simple images which spurs the sense of ambiguity, Zukofsky disrupts at almost every single word. There is little-to-no sense of syntactic continuity, and instead the result is less a poem than it is a list. However, as Bernstein argues in his lecture "Before Time: for David Antin," this parataxis is what returns a sense of presence to the scene without allowing the

strict, forced trajectory of plot to rob the work of its *now-time*. By instead structuring the poem through a collage of combined colors, alternate common names, and syntactic knots, Zukofsky produces a work that seems, by virtue of its condensed form, geared toward a reading that follows the model of the poem's construction: nonlinear, associative, and hypertextual.

What remains to be addressed would be, first, the survey of the themes of field poetics throughout the entirety of *"A"*, as no book-length work since Barry Ahearn's has approached the poem as a whole. Even a critical edition of *"A"* is unavailable and would be necessary for opening up broader study of the poet. Furthermore, I believe it would be more productive to consider Zukofsky alongside poets and artists working *after* him, rather than continuing to feed a fed horse and compare him only with the predecessors Pound and Williams. While this work was productive and insightful, it remains a too-common approach to the reading Zukofsky's work, and it would be invaluable work to poetic study to examine, *hear* how Zukofsky's work, its afterlives, recur throughout contemporary poetic work.

As it stands, the mid-1990's served as the critical peak for Zukofsky studies, with the work of those such as Bob Perelman. And while every now and then a chapter on Zukofsky creeps into a book, I believe that the current American landscape provides an important angle for reading Zukofsky in the Internet age. When "historical and contemporary particulars" come under attack from the very top of our society, it makes more sense than ever for scholars in the field of poetics to address how our literatures have dealt with the erasure of history in the past, when thinkers like Walter Benjamin produced their most desperate work in the face of real political violence. Up until now, Zukofsky has been treated as somewhat of an esoteric writer divorced from the real world, a writer of *l'art pour l'art*, but I believe that

his perspective and artistic output offer timely meditations on the importance of remembering and keeping history alive.

While my proposition of the concept of *escape-work* stems from the intellectual sources of French post-structuralism, and the discussion of absorption in the previous chapter is grounded in the study of poetics, I would like to consider further how it may be relevant today in a world where borders have become increasingly impermeable and national identities become more and more resistant to accommodating difference. Perhaps in reading works that take as their concern physical movement and cloaking would provide productive sources for refining this concept so that it may apply outside of a purely theoretical realm. There are productive possibilities to work that operates along the lines of Bernstein's proposed approach in "The Pataquerical Imagination," what he proposes as "bent studies," which includes the study of ambience (as I discussed in the work of Tan Lin), idiolect, nude formalisms (distressed metrics), modularity, and musical-poetic crosspollination (*Pitch of Poetry* 298-99). By conceiving of radically new means of reading poetry against the grain of traditional – though still valuable – prosodic study, there is an exorbitant amount of work to be done in studying the likes of Zukofsky, Lin, and other more recent poets that may engender wildly new realizations about the way that poetry and poetic language connect to the world outside of the book.

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Appendix

Some Textual Examples

"A"-22 excerpt

Late later and much later
surge sea erupts boiling molten
lava island from ice, land
seen into color thru day
and night: voiced, once unheard
earth beginning idola of years
that love well forget late.
History's best emptied of names'
impertinence met on the ways:
shows then the little earth
at regard of the heavens
unfolding tract and flying congregate
birds their hiding valentine's day:
little horse can you speak
won't know till it speaks:
three birches in the meadow
kiss: constant please. Attentive as
good: no prophet no footnote:
earliest mountain the lowest the
seas moil, thin earth crust
resists less, thickened thrown highest;
stone, coral time evoke chitin's—
word time a voice bridled
as order, what is eternal
is living, a tree's growing
body's actual shadow in light.
Figured 135,000 years built up
from 75 foot depth the
coast gained from the sea—
upheaval subsided or still gaining—
colder currents south, warmer north:
conjecture not for the ganoid
or monkey dropped from branch's
perch – breccia – tumulus skull fished.
Cave, moraine – in peat moss
layers lie tree trunks, red
pine called *fir*, oak above
or beech; higher – alder, hazel,
birch sinking, aspen indifferently everywhere. (*"A"* 511-512)

"A"-23 excerpt

Ye nó we see hay
io we hay we see
hay io we sée no
we see knee (windsong bis)
we knee we see hay
io we hay we see
hay io we see knee
hay io wé see knee
hay io we hów we
see hay io we see,
no wee knee no wa–.
Akin jabber too hot to
rail all but cheek a
hard game clambers treed, cliff
for honey has she danced
ahead there, pipes and flute,
let her dance ahead (5-year
planner plans a wife, nose
whose now he knows) papyrus
jungle sandhill splayed-wedge wader damsel
crane: or sun hot bright
turn home slowed yellow horse
or cold with fear the
need turned small sing itself
font of old white cloud
and men grown flower plough
empowers how soon their senate
night debate proves mixed blessing
to a wife up late
child's tears years o la
la lu, rocked raring horses
sue myrrh holy leazing golden
tile. Praise! gill . . gam . . mesh . . (*"A"* 539-540)_

"A"-21 excerpt

(*Voice off*)
    When Plautus lay dead Comedy wept
an empty scene, laughs, lewd mimes, jokes hushed,
innumerable simultaneous numbers clamoring around
Tragedy voicing the dead smile undivined good –

Old friends
when I was young
you laughed with my tongue
but when I sang
for forty years
you hid in your ears
hardly a greeting

I was
being poor
termed difficult
tho I attracted a cult
of leeches
and they signed *love*
and drank its cordials
always for giving
when they were receiving
they presumed
an infinite forgiveness

With my weak eyes
I did not see
assumed a bit
of infinite myself
arrogating hypocrisy
to *no* heart
but stupidity

O it was
better better
than equating favors
a few to my balance
years later
charged as
cantankerous
in their senile scrounging
getting on

And tho love starve
carved mostly bones
(not *those* young friends
put to good use)
if I'm not dead
a dead mask smiles
to all old friends
still young where else
it says *take care*
prosper
without my tongue
only your own   (*"A"* 499-500)

Vita

Griffin Carter Rowe was born in Jacksonville, Florida, to Michael and Elaine Rowe. He graduated from J.R. Arnold High School in 2013. In May 2016, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. In the fall of 2017, Mr. Rowe accepted teaching and research assistantships in English at Appalachian State University and began work toward a Master of Arts degree. The M.A. was awarded in August 2019. As of August 2019, Mr. Rowe resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.